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THE Nation

MAY 18/25, 2020

Biden's Most Important Decision
JOHN NICHOLS

2020 SPRING BOOKS

Corey Robin
on the life of the comrade

Lovia Gyarkye
on Sarah Broom's family saga

Rashid Khalidi
on Edward Said's afterlives

Eric Foner
on the Radical Republicans

Maggie Doherty
on Mary Gaitskill's art

E. Tammy Kim
on 21st century organizing

Jan-Werner Müller
on liberal democracy's future

Jennifer Wilson
on the Franz Boas circle

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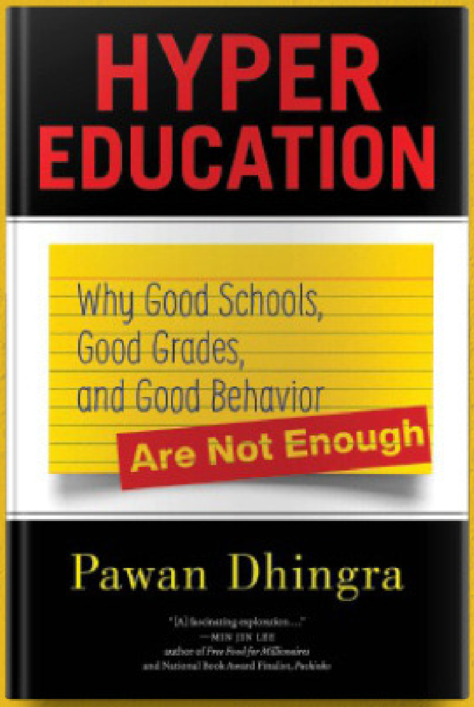

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—Min Jin Lee, author of *Free Food for Millionaires* and National Book Award Finalist, *Pachinko*

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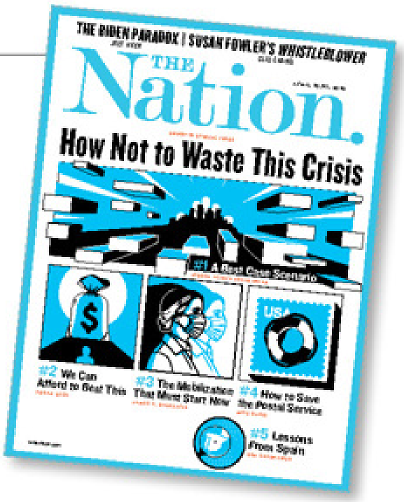
THE BIDEN PARADOX | SUSAN FOWLER'S WHISTLEBLOWER
THE Nation.
How Not to Waste This Crisis
#1 A Best Case Scenario
#2 We Can Afford to Beat This
#3 The Mobilization That Must Start Now
#4 How to Save the Postal Service
#5 Lessons From Spain

Neither Snow nor Rain nor Covid-19

Re "How to Save the Postal Service," by Mike Davis [April 20/27]: Thanks to *The Nation* for recognizing the US Postal Service as an essential public service as it carries on undaunted through the coronavirus contagion. The USPS Fairness Act, now before the Senate, would do much to address the entirely unfair retiree prefunding requirement at the core of the Postal Service's financial woes and to keep it solvent. As for tapping into Amazon's windfall profits as a potential revenue stream, the USPS is indeed Amazon's principal delivery conduit, and those who suggest the Postal Service simply isn't driving a hard enough per-package bargain with the high-handed merchandising leviathan are very likely correct.

Mike Wettstein Jr.
Appleton, Wis.

On Holding Your Nose

I can understand Rohan Grey's frustration, in "Whatever It Takes" [April 20/27], about Joe Biden's hesitancies regarding a progressive Democratic agenda and his part in forming and upholding Barack Obama's policies (e.g., the bailout of the banking system instead of enabling millions of Americans to keep their homes safe from foreclosure). And then there is what Grey calls, in reference to the global climate crisis, Biden's "defensive bluster and nostalgic promises to restore the 2016 Paris Agreement." Grey ends with "Such hypocrisy from someone aspiring to the office of president of the United States is morally and practically unacceptable."

Where Grey's language leads one inevitably—though I hope not *The Nation*'s readers—is to refrain from voting for Biden for president in November, thereby ushering in another term for Donald Trump. Furthermore, if progressives refrain from voting entirely, the Senate will remain under Republican control, the House may lose its Democratic majority, and governorships and state legislatures will fall into the GOP's hands. And Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg can't live forever. How about a 6-3 conservative majority on the Supreme Court?

In Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus*, Volumnia says in response to a revolt against her son, "Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, / And so shall starve with feeding." Grey may have his anger, but anyone who would not welcome four more years of Trump had better vote for Biden in November.

Jack Kligerman
Bozeman, Mont.

Progress v. Progressive Values

I am, to put it mildly, disappointed that the Democratic presidential primaries have produced Joe Biden as the party's presumptive nominee. That said, I did not read Jeet Heer's "The Pennsylvania Paradox" [April 20/27] and have zero intention of reading any future Biden bashing that *The Nation* publishes over the next six months, which at this political moment does a grave disservice to America.

The voters have made clear that he is their choice, but one doesn't need to be a Biden supporter to grasp the reality that the next administration will be either Biden's or an extension of Donald Trump's. Every Biden-bashing piece you publish from here through November serves only to increase dismay, discord, and disunity among the majority of Americans who want to eliminate the corrupt, criminal, immoral Trump administration—thereby making four more years of Trump more likely.

If Biden defeats Trump, I will be at the head of the queue demanding that *The Nation* return to illuminating Biden's regressive policy positions and helping hold his administration

(continued on page 12)

The Nation.
since 1865

Covid's Unequal Toll

By now it's clear that the novel coronavirus is no "great equalizer." Not everyone has work they can do from home or a vacation house to retreat to—let alone paid sick leave. These economic divides became obvious early in the pandemic's spread, as states issued their stay-at-home orders.

What took longer to emerge is that the pandemic is amplifying a vast racial divide, killing a disproportionate share of people of color across the United States. Deep racialized disparities began to surface in late March as a handful of counties released preliminary counts of infections and deaths. In Wisconsin's Milwaukee County, all the people who had died as of March 27 were black; in Michigan as of April 2, black residents accounted for 40 percent of Covid-19 deaths, nearly triple their share of the state's population. Similarly lopsided death or infection rates appeared in a number of cities, including New Orleans, Chicago, and Charlotte, North Carolina.

But getting a clear picture of the extent of racialized disparities across the country has been a struggle because of the failure of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and many local and state authorities to release detailed demographic information. On March 30, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Representative Ayanna Pressley, and other Democrats wrote to Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, admonishing his department for the gap in information. "Without demographic data on the race and ethnicity of patients…it will be impossible for practitioners and policy makers to address disparities in health outcomes and inequities in access to testing and treatment as they emerge," they wrote. "This lack of information will exacerbate existing health disparities and result in the loss of lives in vulnerable communities." Democrats introduced a bill to require federal health officials to publish racial data regularly; key aspects of that legislation were included in the latest coronavirus relief package.

While the CDC and additional states have begun to release more racial and ethnic data, it remains incomplete. Race is missing or unspecified in nearly 60 percent of the confirmed cases reported by the CDC, and as of this writing, the agency has not released demographic data on Covid-19 testing. Many states are effectively erasing Native Americans from their data sets by classifying them as "other," despite the fact that the states tracking that demographic, such as Arizona and New Mexico, have found severely disparate rates of infection or death.

Here's some of we do know, based on an analysis by APM Research Lab, which compiled data from the 35 states (and the District of Columbia) that are now reporting racial demographics for Covid-19 deaths. As of April 28, black Americans are dying at 2.7 times the rate for whites, or 26 deaths per 100,000 people. According to APM, "Black Americans are dying at elevated rates, relative to their population, in 28 of the 36 jurisdictions." In New York the mortality rate among black residents is 138.9 per 100,000. Latino residents in New York also have shockingly high mortality rates. In DC, Michigan, and South Carolina, the gap between blacks' population share and percentage of deaths is more than 30 points.

This crisis within a crisis is at once urgent and predictable. Historically, disasters—from the 1918 flu pandemic to Hurricane Katrina—tend to magnify inequality rather than level it. Covid-19 is retracing patterns of disease and death long documented by public health experts, who have found that black Americans are more likely than whites to suffer from a variety of illnesses and chronic conditions—such as diabetes and hypertension, common comorbidities in Covid-19 hospitalizations—and to die prematurely. While some treat these disparities as a mystery ("Why is it that the African American community is so much, you know, numerous times more [likely to die] than everybody else?…It doesn't make sense," President Trump said recently), there's a robust body of research indicating that systemic racism and its related stress exact a physical toll that compounds

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Cover illustration: Eric Hanson

over a lifetime. In the case of Covid-19, these underlying inequities are reinforcing more immediate factors that increase exposure to the virus and limit access to care, including testing.

Missing or incomplete data remains a pressing concern because data often determines the allocation of money and other resources. In the early stages of the pandemic, the turmoil at hospitals may have contributed to some of the gaps, as did testing by commercial labs that sometimes withheld information. Another factor was the deep cuts made to state and local public health departments after the 2008 recession. Now a coalition of groups is calling on the federal government to provide funding for more detailed data collection.

But data does not solve problems on its own. During a recent webinar organized by Data & Society, writer Kenyon Farrow critiqued the tendency for media outlets and others to get stuck on "this spectacle of the disproportionate rates of black people dying" and on "requests for data and not the things we need to do to stop the epidemic," such as to direct testing and other resources to the communities most at risk. And data doesn't mean the same thing to everyone: Already, some public figures expressing concern about racialized disparities are stopping short of acknowledging the inequities that underly them, choosing instead to point a finger at individual behavior. ("Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs," Surgeon General Jerome Adams suggested recently, directing his advice to communities of color.) The pandemic is repeating an old pattern in whom it kills. There's a real risk that the way we explain the crisis will also perpetuate familiar falsehoods. ZOË CARPENTER FOR *THE NATION*

Choose Wisely

Democrats really can't waste the VP slot this time.

Joe Biden needs to define an unfocused and frequently listless presidential bid by selecting a dynamic running mate. The vice presidential pick, the most consequential decision of the presumed nominee's campaign, will do much to determine whether the Democratic ticket has the popular appeal to end the most dangerous presidency in American history. It will also determine the extent to which a Democratic surge can give the party the full control of Congress necessary to govern in a moment that could be as challenging as the one Franklin Delano Roosevelt faced in 1933. Let's hope Biden doesn't blow the choice—as Hillary Clinton did in 2016 and as too many other Democratic nominees have done in too many other races that could have been won.

Clinton was overconfident about her prospects against Donald Trump, a rival so jarringly unfit that she struggled to wrap her head around the fact that he was even in contention. She was, as *Politico* explained, "more concerned with finding a long-term governing partner than an electrifying campaigner on the road." Her VP pick, Virginia Senator Tim Kaine, shared her centrist ideology, came from a state the Democrats were likely to win, and was, as even she acknowledged, boring. So why did she pick him? Because, she said, he "can help me govern." That's nice. But you can't govern if you don't win.

CNBC dubbed him "Clinton's safe choice." In fact, he wasn't safe at all. "Republicans will run hard against Democrats on trade this year," warned Stephanie Taylor of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. "Unfortunately, since Tim Kaine voted to fast-track the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Republicans now have a new opening to attack Democrats on this economic populist issue." Democrats in swing states grumbled that he did nothing to help excite voters. Just over three months after the ticket was announced, Clinton lost Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—and with them the White House.

If Clinton had been an outlier, that would be one thing. But Democratic presidential nominees have made the same costly mistake time and time again—think Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, Michael Dukakis and Lloyd Bentsen—only to pay the price on Election Day. By now, the lesson should be clear: Instead of looking for a governing partner, Biden needs someone who can get him into a position to govern. Yes, as the oldest major party nominee in American history, he must choose someone that voters see as capable of stepping into the top job and of leading the 2024 ticket if Biden decides against seeking reelection. But beyond that baseline demand, his duty is to pick a candidate who energizes and expands the base, has the potential to tip swing states, and excites the progressives and economic populists who backed Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

Biden recalls Barack Obama telling him that in 2008, "I tried to find someone who had experiences or capacity that I didn't have." Obama proved his capacity to make himself electable. Biden's not there yet. Even as he consolidated his position as the party's presumptive nominee, he faced criticism for taking economic policy advice from former treasury secretary Larry Summers, complaints about an online ad's anti-China language, and renewed allegations that he sexually assaulted an aide in 1993. Even if Biden addresses those issues—as he must—the Trump camp will amplify every vulnerability. Clearly, the pressure is on the former vice president to expand his electoral appeal by choosing a compelling running mate.

Biden says he'll pick a woman. But who? Swing-state obsessives point to Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer or Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar. Unfortunately, both women mirror Biden's corporate-friendly centrism. Progressives recommend Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren or Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, a single-payer health care advocate who has a winning record in a frequent swing state. Other prospects include Nevada Senator Catherine Cortez Masto and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham; selecting one of them, former representative Luis Gutiérrez argued, could strengthen Biden's appeal among the Latinx voters who backed Sanders.

The idea of making what's been described as a doubly historic VP selection has been energetically advanced by 2018 Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, who has said, "Having a woman of color on the ticket will help promote not only diversity but trust." More than 200 African American women have signed an open letter urging Biden "to seize this historic opportunity to choose a Black woman running mate who will fight for the issues that matter most to the American people and help deliver a decisive victory and a successful Biden presidency." Abrams is a prospect, as is Senator Kamala Harris of California. So, too, is Representative Val Demings, a vital voice in the Trump impeachment hearings who hails from the swing state of Florida.

There is something profoundly healthy about this campaigning to influence Biden. It democratizes the process. Yes, of course that makes things harder for him. But he needs to be pushed beyond his comfort zone; that is the best way to get a sense of how he will handle the demands of the fall campaign and the presidency. It is not too much to ask, in the year 2020, that the Democratic nominee for president make an intersectional choice that breaks with political orthodoxy and seeks to inspire the turnout necessary for a transformational victory. Indeed, that is precisely what Democrats should demand of their expected nominee. JOHN NICHOLS

Asking for a Friend

Liza Featherstone

The Maine Drag

Dear Liza,

There's a big stink here in Maine over people coming up from the New York City area to ride out the coronavirus lockdown. Maine is in many ways a Third World country and, especially outside Southern Maine, still largely reliant on tourism and resource extraction. Resentment of rich folks from away is baked into our DNA. It's pretty ugly, and I know it's happening elsewhere, too.

A friend of mine told me approvingly about a neighbor who chewed out some people when she found out they had come up from New York City to flee the Covid-19 crisis. She demanded to know whether they'd brought their own supplies so they wouldn't go into local stores. And others who arrived to shelter in their summer homes have had their cars vandalized.

This all makes me somewhat uncomfortable. Our area is heavily dependent on summer folk, so we've always had a relationship with them, one complicated by their class privilege. We, of course, resent them for treating us as lesser, but it seems cruel to beat them up for seeking safety. We also have a large refugee population, and the anger directed at both groups feels uncomfortably similar.

Solidarity with people with second (or third) homes feels funny but also like the humane response. What do you think? ***—Mainelander***

Dear Mainelander,

It's been enraging to see the well-off leave New York City with so little regard for the impact on their chosen destinations. There have been media reports of rich urbanites carrying the virus to the Hamptons, the Jersey Shore, and Florida. Also, since they can afford to hoard, the wealthy have been buying up much of the food in local stores. Health officials warn that such migrations risk overburdening small, understaffed hospitals ill-equipped for the outbreak. It's a sharp illustration of how an entitled class places its health and well-being above others'.

Your neighbors are right to resent this behavior. The rich should not be allowed to disregard the survival needs of locals. Some policy-makers agree. The governor of New Jersey asked people with second homes not to travel to them during the pandemic. Some Long Island officials did likewise. In early April your governor, Janet Mills, ordered all new arrivals to self-quarantine for 14 days and said others should not come at all if they're showing symptoms of Covid-19 or are from virus hot spots like New York City. She has shuttered hotels and short-term rentals to further discourage visitors. Violators could face fines and jail time. Rhode Island has taken even more aggressive measures: In late March, Governor Gina Raimondo issued an executive order that had the state police stopping cars with New York license plates and sending officers door-to-door to order New Yorkers into self-quarantine. She said of her order, "This is not a suggestion." (Under criticism from the American Civil Liberties Union and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, she doubled down, expanding her order to include all out-of-state visitors, not just New Yorkers.)

Still, Mainelander, your attitude is decent and humane and your concerns well founded. To some readers, the parallel you're drawing between refugees and well-heeled urbanites might seem like a stretch. But considering the history of populisms that target people "from away," it is not. Anti-Semitism in Europe has often been mixed with class resentment against bankers. In the 1970s, Idi Amin pursued a racist policy of exclusion against South Asians in Uganda, grounded partly in the popular resentment of South Asian immigrants who had prospered and become a privileged class. While the class struggle of workers against capitalists is always necessary—as is political pressure for the redistribution of wealth—the populist resentment of those seen as "not from here" can take an ugly turn.

Questions? Ask Liza at TheNation.com/article/asking-for-a-friend

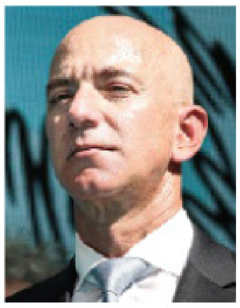
Dear Liza,

I live in Westchester County in New York, one of the first areas hit hard by the coronavirus. My husband and I don't go out except

(continued on page 8)

ILLUSTRATION BY **JOANNA NEBORSKY**

BY THE NUMBERS



5.4%
Increase in US median household net worth between 1989 and 2016

1,130%
Increase in US billionaires' net worth from 1990 to 2020

79%
Decline in US billionaires' tax obligation, as a share of net worth, between 1980 and 2018

43%
Share of US adults whose household has lost income because of the coronavirus pandemic

$282B
Increase in US billionaires' wealth from March 18 through April 10

$27.1B
Increase in Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's net worth since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic

$3.2T
Total wealth of US billionaires

—Emily Berch

Elie Mystal

Lights, Camera, SCOTUS!

Justice means making the Supreme Court as accessible and transparent as other courts.

For six days in May, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments by phone. The court has picked 10 arguments, spanning 13 cases, that it has deemed time sensitive. It will let lawyers argue their positions via conference call. The audio feed will be made available, live, to the press and members of the general public.

It's a momentous step for the Supreme Court, which has never before allowed live audio or video coverage of its arguments. In *The New York Times*, Adam Liptak reported that the court has made same-day audio recordings of arguments available only 27 times in the past two decades.

While it's significant that the court is willing to adopt technology that has been available since the 1950s in order to keep working under coronavirus social-distancing protocols, the decision highlights the sheer absurdity of the court's continued stance against cameras in the courtroom. Rather than jump feetfirst into the present and handle its full docket online, with audio and video, as other courts are doing, the Supreme Court is now trying to cherry-pick which cases are truly important—as if any case the Supreme Court decides to hear isn't critical to some person, group, or collection of rights—because it doesn't want to make it too easy for the public to hear and see what it's doing.

The argument against cameras in the courtroom has always been a little bit tortured. Courts are public institutions. All courts (except the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court) are open to the public. If you want to see a Supreme Court argument, all you have to do is wake up early and stand in line. Putting a live feed in the courtroom is simply about making it easier for the public to hear and see what it's already entitled to hear and see.

But the Supreme Court has resisted making itself more transparent and easier to access. The argument against cameras—and it comes from both conservative and liberal justices—is that their presence will result in the C-SPAN effect, encouraging advocates to mug for the cameras and make arguments in sound bites that play well on cable news when they're supposed to be making highly technical arguments to the court. There's also some worry that justices will be afraid to ask tough questions that are legally relevant but might make them look bad.

For what it's worth, I agree with most of the arguments against live coverage of the Supreme Court. I think lawyers, especially Republican ones, would attempt to make cute yet legally irrelevant comments to become stars on Fox News. And every congressional hearing I've watched tells me that humans are bad at resisting the urge to turn questions into speeches. There should be a German word for "stupidity and pandering induced by being on camera": *Dummfernsehendoof*.

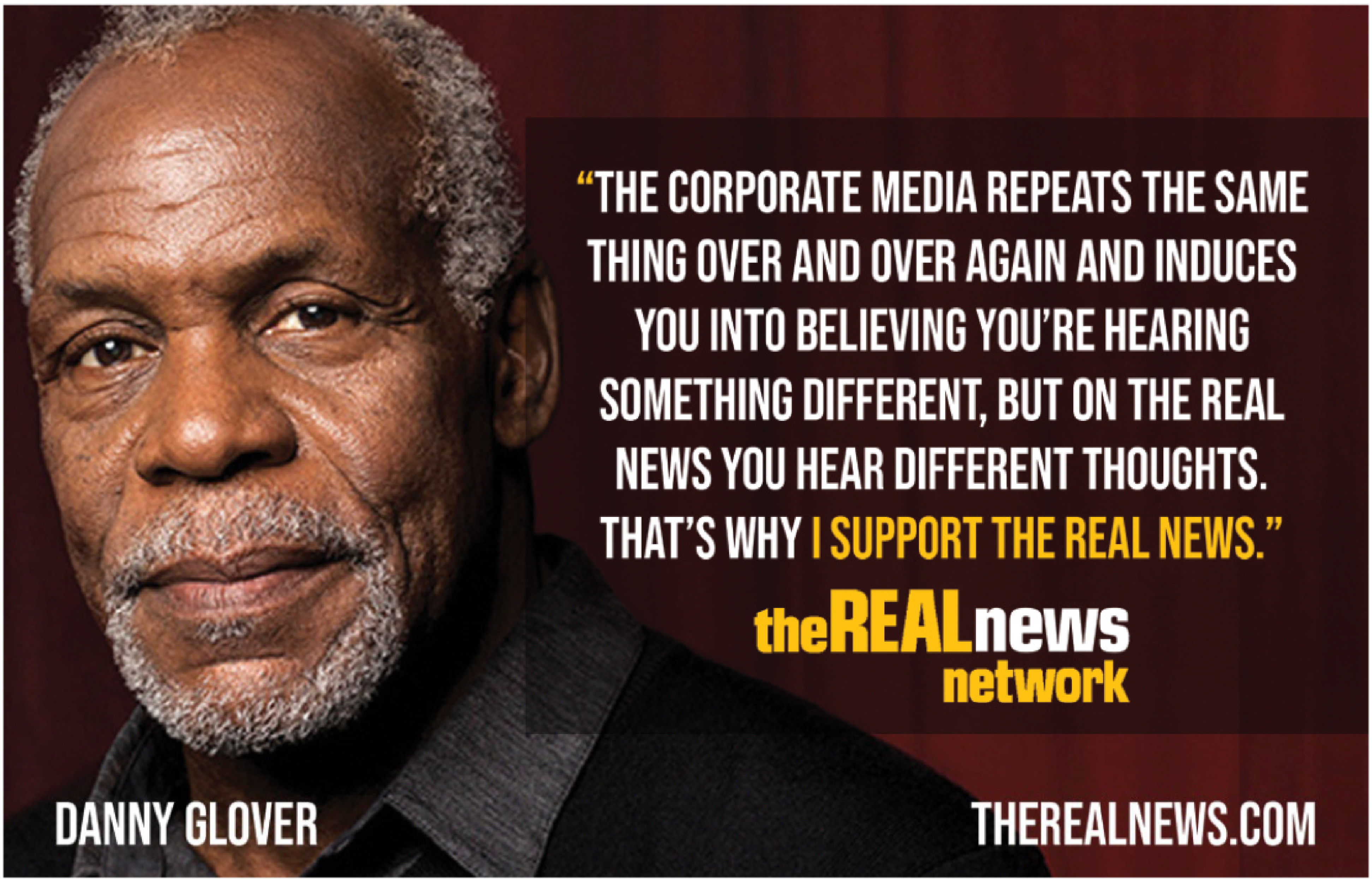
Where I disagree is that I just don't think the negatives come close to outweighing the positives of increased transparency. Most people don't understand what the Supreme Court does, and that's in part because most people never get to see the court doing it. It might be hard for nonlawyers to follow along with the technical legal arguments involving, say, the statutory interpretation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. But "it's OK to fire people because they're gay" is the core argument that would pierce through the jargon. People would notice which justices thought that was a good idea, and people might start to ask which political party insists on appointing such justices.

The Supreme Court is a political institution just like Congress or the presidency. It's long past time we started covering the court like we cover the legislative and executive branches, and opening up access to its proceedings would be the first step in that process. Right now, in part because of the limited access the court grants to its proceedings, reporting on the Supreme Court is largely left to a cadre of reporters sponsored by the legacy media. They're a skilled and professional group, but they are generally male and blindingly white. (Supreme Court reporters make the White House press corps look like a rainbow coalition.) Coverage of the court reflects those white male sensibilities. When reports about court cases seem intellectually detached from the real world consequences of the rulings, that's not just because the law values dispassionate analysis; that's in part because the humans whose rights and dignities are being stripped away are underrepresented in the room where it's happening.

> *Most people don't understand what the Supreme Court does, in part because most people never get to see the court doing it.*

Other federal courts are trying to find a way to make video technology work during the coronavirus crisis. There are privacy and security concerns with some of the technology, along with the inevitable technical challenges that come when people try to learn new applications. But most courts understand that conducting

LEFT: ELIF OZTURK / ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT: ANDY FRIEDMAN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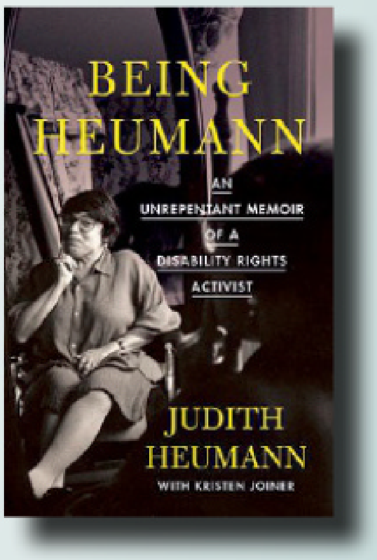
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AN UNREPENTANT MEMOIR OF A DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST
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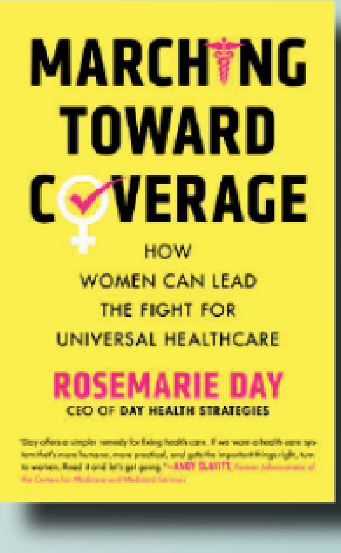
co-director of *Crip Camp*


MARCHING TOWARD COVERAGE
HOW WOMEN CAN LEAD THE FIGHT FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE
ROSEMARIE DAY
CEO OF DAY HEALTH STRATEGIES

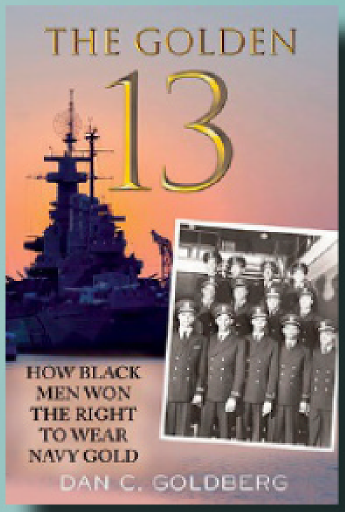
"**COMPELLING AND PROVOCATIVE,** this book is a primer in healthcare and an activist call to action in one."

—SANDRO GALEA
dean of the School of Public Health at Boston University

The Smartphone Society
Technology, Power, and Resistance in the New Gilded Age
Nicole Aschoff

"I will never look at my smartphone the same way and . . . neither will you."

—JASON W. MOORE
author of
Capitalism in the Web of Life


THE GOLDEN 13
HOW BLACK MEN WON THE RIGHT TO WEAR NAVY GOLD
DAN C. GOLDBERG

"**A MUST-READ** for anyone interested in race, service, heroism, [or] the civil rights movement."

—CHRISTINA M. GREER
author of
Black Ethnics

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their proceedings in public is a necessary component of administering that justice.

Only the Supreme Court is trying to hide in the shadows. Yes, the court will get around to hearing arguments on *Trump v. Mazars* and *Trump v. Vance* when the justices dial in for that six-day session. Those are important cases about whether Donald Trump's tax returns and other financial documents can be subpoenaed under the normal operation of law. But the court left *California v. Texas*, a critical case about the continued constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act, off its emergency docket. That decision sets the stage for the court to hold off ruling the ACA unconstitutional, as it almost certainly will, until after the elections, thus protecting Republicans from getting punished at the polls for their stance against the popular health care law.

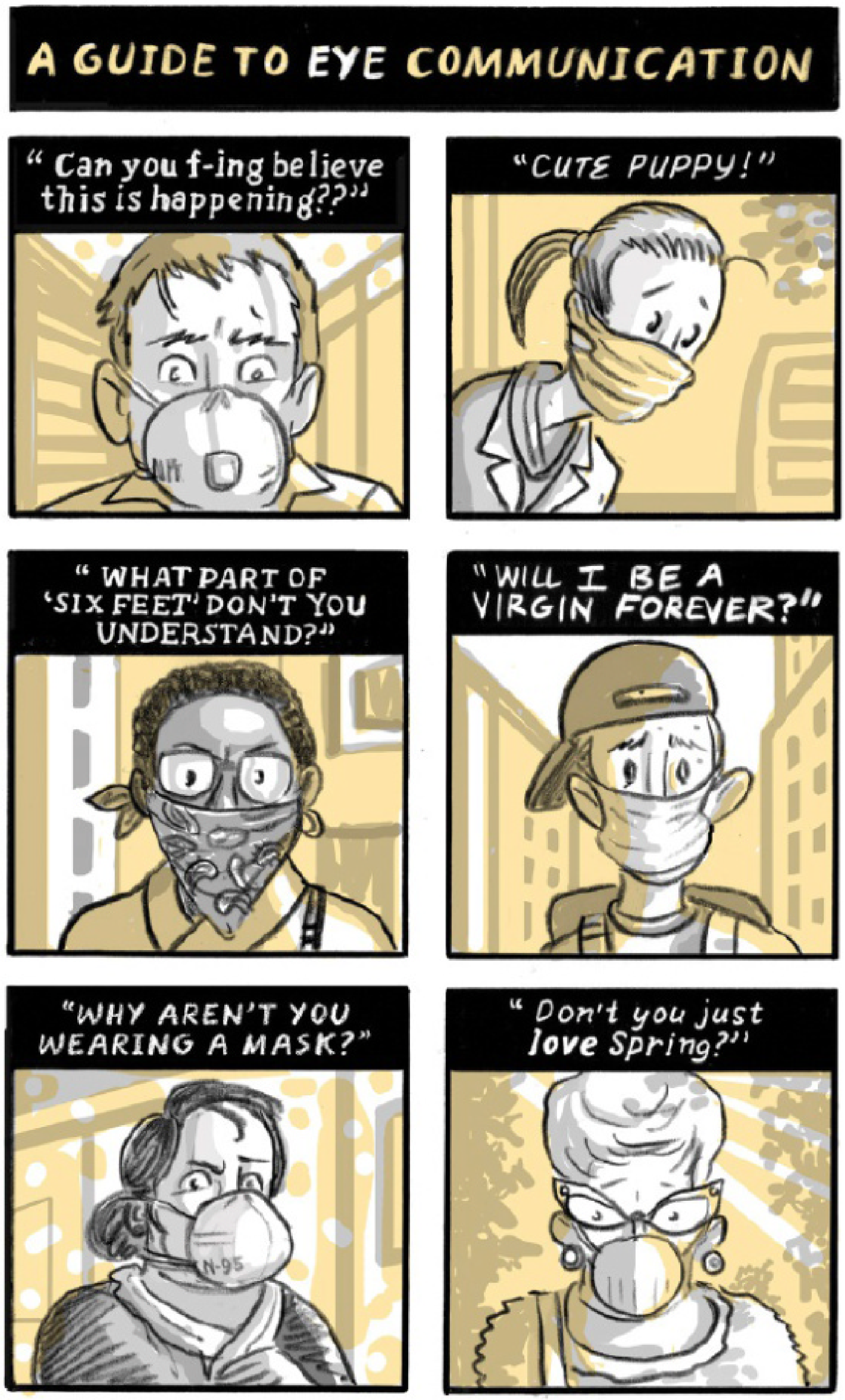
Whenever the court hears it, the Obamacare case is a perfect example of why we should turn on the cameras. We should be able to see alleged attempted rapist Brett Kavanaugh misconstrue the ACA as unconstitutional and then play clips of his questions in a campaign attack ad against Senator Susan Collins. Collins, most people will remember, defended Kavanaugh and was a key vote in favor of his confirmation, so when he overturns the health care law, it'll be her fault as much as anybody's.

That's why cameras are still excluded from the Supreme Court. Even though justices are appointed for life, they don't want the kind of heat that would come from the public seeing what they're doing. They don't want their political benefactors to have to answer for their nominations and confirmation votes. They want to operate in darkness because injustice abhors the light. ■

The Supreme Court is a political institution. It's time we cover the court like the legislative and executive branches.

COMIX NATION

PETER KUPER


A GUIDE TO EYE COMMUNICATION
" Can you f-ing believe this is happening??"
"CUTE PUPPY!"
" WHAT PART OF 'SIX FEET' DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?"
"WILL I BE A VIRGIN FOREVER?"
"WHY AREN'T YOU WEARING A MASK?"
" Don't you just love Spring?"
N-95

(continued from page 5)

to take walks, without getting near people. I am wary of going to grocery stores, since the virus can linger in the air and people can have it without symptoms. But the only delivery service near me that has any slots available is Instacart. I know it sends people to stores to buy the items, so that means we would be paying to put its workers at risk. That might be morally justified because we are over 60, my husband has diabetes, and the workers might be younger. But then again, the person dispatched to pick up my groceries might expose an older person. Another option is Amazon. (We don't have Amazon Fresh, but there is some food available on the main site.) Since the workers would be packing it in a warehouse, I believe they would be less at risk than in a store. Do you think this is the most moral option? —At Risk

Dear At Risk,

Amazon's warehouse workers do face serious danger during this pandemic. Many have contracted Covid-19 because of the company's negligence on matters like sick leave. Like Instacart employees, Amazon workers all over the country have been going on strike and protesting these conditions. Though some of these workers are young, I wouldn't assume the coronavirus is not a threat to them; at least one has died.

Boycotts are usually intended to economically pressure companies to change their behavior. It's almost impossible to imagine that consumers could bring any pain to Amazon, a company with monopolies in so many sectors. But you're right to want to avoid putting workers at risk through your order.

In some places, it's easier to get groceries delivered now than at the beginning of the lockdown. You may be able to use Peapod, Stop & Shop's online service. Some stores provide special shopping times for those who most need protection from the virus. For example, Costco has set aside 8 to 9 AM on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays for shoppers over 60. You can also try calling local grocery stores to ask if they offer curbside pickup, as many now do.

Another option is mutual aid: Many neighborhood groups have organized volunteers to deliver groceries to older and more vulnerable people who shouldn't be going to the store. ■

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Vivas y Libres

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

No Escape

As the coronavirus forces people to remain at home, cases of domestic violence have surged. In Latin America, 24-hour emergency hotlines have not stopped ringing since governments told residents to shelter in place. In Colombia, which recorded 976 murders of women in 2019, the city of Bogotá's police hotline saw a 225 percent increase in calls reporting violence against women in the first weeks of the lockdown. Covid-19 is exacerbating an already dire crisis. So far in 2020, the country's Prosecutor General's Office has recorded 37 femicides, or murders of women because they're women—almost a third of which occurred in the first two weeks of the lockdown.

"The quarantine hit and all [of a] sudden we started having more women text message us," Tara Cookson, the director of Ladysmith, which runs a hotline for women in Cúcuta, Colombia, told *Al Jazeera*. "And more women texting saying things like…'My husband is beating me up, but I'm not allowed to leave.'"

Women are pushing back against gender-based violence and demanding that states do more to protect them. On March 9 in Mexico, almost three weeks before the government asked people to stay home, 6.6 million women "disappeared" for a day as part of a nationwide strike called A Day Without Us. Arussi Unda, who helped organize the protest, expressed her fear about the ongoing coronavirus confinement to *Al Jazeera.* "We're scared because we don't know how long this is going to last." —Sara Baig

Katha Pollitt

The Godmother of Backlash

As states ratify the ERA, 38 years late, an FX series tells the story of its fiercest antagonist.

SUBJECT to DEBATE

"She's a liar, a fearmonger and a con artist," Bella Abzug says of Phyllis Schlafly about two-thirds of the way into *Mrs. America*, FX's fascinating nine-part miniseries about Schlafly and the struggle over the Equal Rights Amendment. "But worst of all, she's a goddamn feminist. She might be one of the most liberated women in America." Indeed. Schlafly, a devout Catholic wife and a mother of six, was a tireless, extremely well-connected right-wing ideologue who made a fabulous career out of telling women that their place was in the home. Unfortunately, she was very good at her job. From a newsletter and meetings held in her living room in Alton, Illinois, she forged the contemporary anti-feminist movement, which not only scuttled the ERA, which fell three states short of ratification in 1982, but also realigned both major political parties around support or hostility to women's rights. To a frightening extent, we are living in the world Schlafly made.

Some of my feminist friends think *Mrs. America* is too sympathetic to Schlafly. I think that impression is largely due to Cate Blanchett's brilliant performance. She is so beautiful, you want to look at her forever, with a creamy softness lacking in photos of the real-life Schlafly, and she brings a humorous twinkle to Schlafly's steely self-control as well. Blanchett's Schlafly is a bit like Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*; it's fun to watch her scheme her way to the top. There's something innately appealing, too, about her drive and pluck. I found myself almost siding with her. Don't let those Republican men put you down, Phyllis! Good for you, going to law school at 50! And if feminists dismiss you as a kook, just show them how wrong they are.

Never underestimate your enemies is one of the main political morals here. The feminist main characters—Gloria Steinem (Rose Byrne), Betty Friedan (Tracey Ullman), Brenda Feigen-Fasteau (Ari Graynor), Bella Abzug (Margo Martindale), Jill Ruckelshaus (Elizabeth Banks), and Shirley Chisholm (Uzo Aduba)—each get an episode, and it is painful to watch their exuberant confidence slowly fade as they belatedly realize that this woman they saw as a joke is outmaneuvering them. Steinem says she won't debate Schlafly because that would give her credibility, leaving it to the deeply unpleasant and irascible Friedan, who loses her cool when they debate at Illinois State University and shouts, "I'd like to burn you at the stake!" (This really happened.) But Friedan—who, along with the racist fundamentalist Lottie Beth Hobbs, is the only character portrayed in a totally negative light, down to her twisted face and wild gray hair—deserves a lot more credit than she gets here. Not only did she write *The Feminine Mystique*, one of the most important nonfiction books of the 20th century, but she was also prescient. Rachel Shteir, whose biography of Friedan is forthcoming, wrote me in an e-mail, "It took [the National Organization for Women] around four or five years to realize what was going on, and then it was too late. So it's easy to caricature Betty for her excesses, but the reality is that her 'Geiger counter' knew who the enemy was."

Friedan, said Shteir, understood early on that Schlafly had grassroots appeal. The others just don't seem to grasp that Schlafly represents actual women. The only time they seriously grapple with why conservative housewives fear the ERA is when Steinem says, "Revolutions are messy. People get left behind." But the consensus seems to be that that's just the way it is.

To a frightening extent, we are still living in the world Phyllis Schlafly made.

Well, maybe so. Certainly nothing would bring around the hard-core evangelicals and racists Schlafly allied herself with to grow the movement. Almost 50 years later, those people are still here, voting for Donald Trump as God's instrument, just like King David. But anti-feminism claimed some women whom feminists should have sought to persuade, too. Although, as Jane Mansbridge writes in *Why We Lost the ERA*, pro-ERA activists gave conflicting and confusing responses to anxieties about drafting women and unisex bathrooms; the real issue was not these things. It was that many women raised to be traditional homemakers, supported by their husbands and respected in their communities, found their pedestals knocked out from under them practically overnight. It was not irrational for them to think the ERA would mean they would lose out in divorce, which was rampant in the 1970s, even if the laws on alimony

LEFT: HERIKA MARTINEZ / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; TOP RIGHT: ANDY FRIEDMAN

and child custody would protect them less than they believed. Nor were they wrong to believe that the status of homemaking was being drastically lowered even as, for many of them, it was too late to choose a different path.

Mrs. America plays deliciously with the unacknowledged common problem of both feminist and anti-feminists: men. Steinem is pornified in *Screw* magazine. Ruckelshaus, the lone Republican feminist portrayed, has to manage five kids and a house while her husband, a genuinely nice guy, has more important things to do. The feminists are betrayed by George McGovern and then by Jimmy Carter. On the other side, Schlafly has to massage the ego of her husband, Fred Schlafly, a prominent right-wing lawyer who is not always happy that she's a star, even though he helps make her one. In one disturbing scene, he insists on sex when she is obviously exhausted. (Her biographer, Donald Critchlow, protested that she had a great marriage, Fred worshipped her, and he would never have done such a thing.)

Phyllis Schlafly has to contend with patronizing and exploitative male politicians, too. Her original passion was for the very male field of foreign policy; anti-feminism was the fallback. She wrote the hugely influential pro–Barry Goldwater book *A Choice Not an Echo*, but he doesn't mention her in his memoirs. She backs Ronald Reagan but doesn't get the cabinet position she thinks he promised her.

The last shot of the series shows her aproned and sad, peeling apples at her kitchen table. If only that had been the real-life end of the Phyllis Schlafly story! On the feminist side, the movement took years to recover from the defeat of the ERA. The parting frames of *Mrs. America* tell us that, almost four decades after the deadline, it's been ratified in Nevada (2017), Illinois (2018), and Virginia (2020)—for the required 38 states. Resurrection or empty gesture? The battle goes on. ■

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

DONALD J. TRUMP, MD

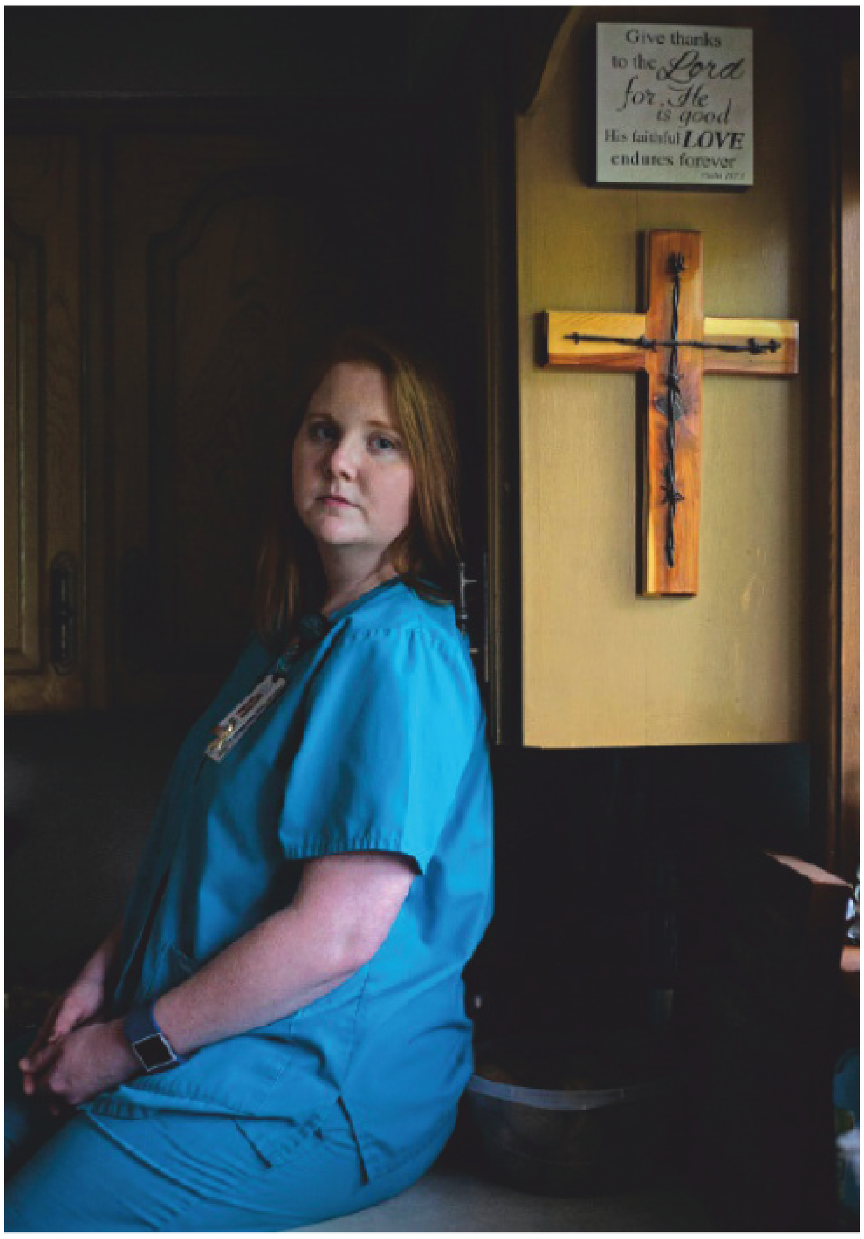
Because his uncle taught at MIT,
He catches on to science—so says he.
That means that from those genes of his from Queens
He knows his stuff on testing and vaccines.
For otherwise, how would he know to teach
The way to conquer Covid: Mainline bleach.

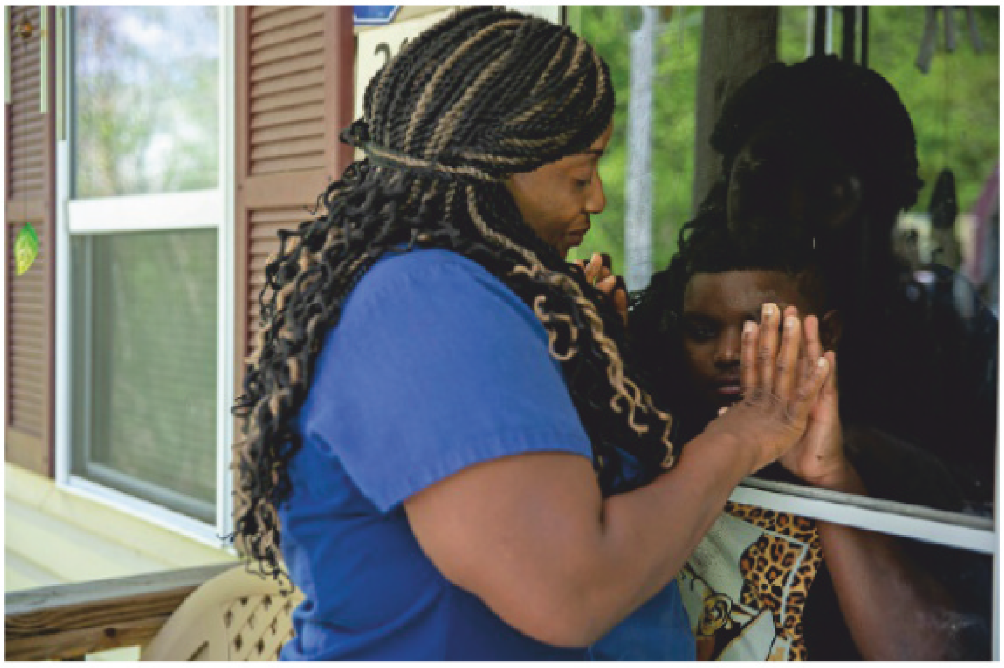
SNAPSHOT / LIZ SANDERS

Taking Care

When my dad died in early March from complications related to dementia, I promised myself I would find the nurses who cared for him and write them a letter or thank them in person. But then life happened: There was a funeral home to contact, a death certificate to order, and then, worst of all, Covid-19 hit. Even while my dad was sick, the people attending to him seemed a blur, zipping into his room, ministering to his needs, and leaving in a flash.

But as the coronavirus crisis began overwhelming our health care system, I realized that the best way to deal with my grief would be to photograph my way through it, to make images of the health care workers who intimately cared for my dad during his illness and at the end of his life. We tend to see these workers only when we need them, and in the case of this pandemic, we weren't prepared, as a nation, to protect them. *—Liz Sanders*





Kallie Lanham, far left, married another hospice nurse; the best part of working together, she said, is having someone to cry with. Certified nursing assistant **Sherry Hutson**, above, talks to her son through her front door. **Joy Speers**, a hospice nurse, kissed the forehead of Sanders's dad as he was dying.

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Letters

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(continued from page 2)

accountable. America should be so lucky. For now, I recommend that you review the past four years of your publication if you really need a reminder of the stakes, then get a grip and pivot to educating your readers about the efforts that are under way across the country to ensure Trump's defeat.

Ulysses Lateiner
somerville, mass.

Pennsylvania isn't the only problem Democrats are facing in the 2020 elections. The biggest problem is making sure that everyone can vote. This will probably mean that thousands of volunteer lawyers will have to be available on Election Day. Long before then, the removal of people from the voter rolls and the relocation and elimination of polling places in many states must be addressed. Fighting voter suppression is crucial.

It appears that Joe Biden will be the Democratic nominee. At least the party's leaders seem to have somewhat awakened and are endorsing him. Hopefully, he will pick Elizabeth Warren as his running mate. Doing so would help win progressive voters. If Bernie Sanders can make sure his supporters vote, he will be in a much better position to make changes in the party's platform and in the coming years. History will then show him to be the hero that he is.

Anne K. Johnson
new york city

Essential Tributes

💬 Re "Underpaid, Ignored, and Essential," illustrated by Molly Crabapple [April 20/27]: Thank you. These are really beautiful and sensitive portraits of real-life heroes and heroines.

Sheila Cano

No More Neoliberalism

I agree with John Nichols that "with the coronavirus outbreak upending every economic calculation, the Democrats' populism must be focused and forward-looking" ["How to Win in Wisconsin," April 13]. Many Democrats have been too deferential to Wall Street. If the Democratic Party hopes to mobilize the Bernie Sanders voting bloc, it should unequivocally repudiate the neoliberal brand of capitalism. The Democratic nominee should announce that the Reagan-Thatcher era is ending and that 2021 is the time to begin finishing the New Deal. Democrats should embrace the idea that economic and social rights are human rights.

Jim Phillips
wichita, kan.

💬 Comments drawn from our website

letters@thenation.com

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Books & the Arts

THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE, 1929 (AFRO AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS / GADO / GETTY IMAGES)

COMRADES

The inner life of American communism

by COREY ROBIN

The communist stands at the crossroads of two ideas: one ancient, one modern. The ancient idea is that human beings are political animals. Our disposition is so public, our orientation so outward, we cannot be thought of apart from the polity. Even when we try to hide our vices, as a character in Plato's *Republic* notes, we still require the assistance of "secret societies and political clubs." That's how present we are to other people and they to us.

The modern idea—that of work—posits a different value. Here Weber may be a better guide than Marx. For the communist, work means fidelity to a task, a stick-to-itiveness that requires clarity of purpose, persistence in the face of opposition or challenge, and a refusal of all distraction. It is more than an instrumental application of bodily power upon the material world or the rational alignment of means and ends (activities so ignoble, Aristotle thought, as to nearly disqualify the laborer from politics). It is a vocation, a revelation of self.

The communist brings to the public life of the ancients the methodism of modern work. In all things be political, says the communist, and in all political things be productive. Anything less is vanity. Like the ancients, the communist looks outward, but her insistence on doing only those actions that yield results is an emanation from within. Effectiveness is a statement of her integrity. The great sin of intellectuals, Lenin observed, is that they "undertake everything under the sun without finishing anything." That failing is symptomatic of their character—their "slovenliness" and "carelessness," their

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Corey Robin teaches at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. His most recent book is The Enigma of Clarence Thomas.

inability to remain true to whatever cause or concern they have professed. The communist does better. She gets the job done.

In their heyday, the communists were the most political and most intentional of people. That made them often the most terrifying of people, capable of violence on an unimaginable scale. Yet despite—and perhaps also because of—their ruthless sense of purpose, communism contains many lessons for us today. As a new generation of socialists, most born after the Cold War, discovers the challenges of parties and movements and the implications of involvement, the archive of communism, particularly American communism, has become newly relevant. So have two commentaries on that archive: Vivian Gornick's *The Romance of American Communism*, originally published in 1977 and reissued this year, and Jodi Dean's *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging*.

I first read *The Romance of American Communism* in the summer of 1993. Gornick had already written her well-regarded memoir *Fierce Attachments*, as well as several other works of criticism. But at the time, she was largely a writer's writer, known mostly to a smallish circle of dedicated readers. I was one of them. A graduate student in political science, I was living with my girlfriend, also a graduate student, in Tennessee. She was working on a dissertation on communities in Appalachia organizing—often unsuccessfully—against plant closings, which soon turned into a meditation on political failure. I was working on a dissertation on the political theory and practice of fear from Hobbes to McCarthyism and the Cold War.

As these topics suggest, it was a bad time for the left and not just in Tennessee. Bill Clinton and the Democrats were pivoting from deficit reduction to NAFTA. Marxism, one of my advisers told me on the first day of graduate school, was for antiquarians. Nobody was interested in an out-of-print oral history of American communism. I found Gornick's book entirely by accident, in a used bookstore on a highway outside Knoxville, Tennessee, and in the course of trying to figure out who the communists were and why they frightened the American establishment so, I discovered how little they conformed to Cold War stereotypes, which, as it turns out, were also my own.

According to midcentury writers like Lionel Trilling and Arthur Koestler, communists were dead souls who had handed themselves over to an alien force, not out of any desire to see justice done or a world transformed but to escape the burdens of individuality and responsibility. Communism was an evacuation of self, an escape from freedom. Though many of these writers had once been communists—or probably because they had once been communists—they could not, looking back, reconstruct the felt experience of living people. Instead they pioneered a form, the autobiography of an ex-zombie, in which a desolation described from without reveals a desolation within, as if to say to the reader, as Gornick writes in the book's opening chapter, "I can taste the ashes but I cannot recall the flame."

The Romance of American Communism
By Vivian Gornick
Verso. 288 pp. $19.95

Comrade
An Essay on Political Belonging
By Jodi Dean
Verso. 176 pp. $19.95

Gornick's task in *Romance* was clear. She wanted to rekindle that flame not for warmth but for illumination, to retrieve the truth of the communist experience, as it was lived from the inside, from the highbrow obscurantism of Cold War liberalism. Instead of othering and dehumanization, there would be humanism and recognition; instead of zombies, there would be a self, a person "who, in contact with a political vision, was made *more* human than he ever dreamed he could be." The literary mode Gornick settled on—writerly profiles of more than 40 communists, in which a diversity of men and women ("They Came From Everywhere" is the title of an early chapter) speak in their own words (or Gornick's version of their words) for pages at a time—also seemed drawn from the Cold War. With its confessional voice and authorial presence, the book could be read either as New Journalism from the 1960s and the 1970s (Hilton Kramer called it a "particularly odious" instance of the form) or as a forerunner of the social histories of the Communist Party that came out in the 1980s and sought to rescue the communist from the enormous incomprehension of posterity. The only way out of the Cold War, *Romance* seemed to suggest, was to work through it. That's what Gornick offered: a passage through and exit from a long and lonely corridor of mind.

Today, Gornick's book reads differently, less bound by the genres and concerns of the Cold War. Her effort to reconstruct the communist experience seems less a rescue operation of the self than a reconfiguration of the self in classical terms. One former communist, for example, tells her that in the party there was little discussion of personal life; there was only politics. But despite knowing almost nothing of his comrades' lives, he "felt an intimacy" with them that he will "never feel again." His point is obvious: Members of the Communist Party may not have issued reports from the interior, but they did disclose themselves, through action, through the dailiness of their lived commitments. Though mindful of the psyche and the originality of its demands—one communist tells Gornick, "The party was down on Freud, but in the Bronx we said, 'Yeah, yeah, but your mother's important anyway'"—communists found their confessional in public life. People became "*real* to me only in political engagement," says another communist.

Such testimony recalls the literature of ancient Greece, in which character is revealed, not destroyed, through political action. And if character is destroyed through politics, it is not because the actor has recklessly sought wholeness in a place where wholeness is not to be had, as liberal anticommunists so often have claimed. It is because politics is a compression chamber of the self. There we grapple with our conflicting duties to one another, cope with failure and loss, imagine and honor the presence of others, and struggle to distinguish what is from what must be, with no sheltering warmth of privacy, no safe rooms for experiment or error. Our everyday fumblings are enacted in the brightest, most unforgiving light. The pressure is enormous; the insight, nearly blinding. "The Communist experience is of epic proportions, arousing to pity and terror," Gornick writes. "It is a metaphor for fear and desire on the grand scale, always telling us more—never less—of what it is to be human." Her title invokes romance, but her content is also tragedy. Even her use of pseudonyms takes on an archaic cast: What seemed during the Cold War an effort to protect the anonymity of individuals ruined or threatened by the blacklist now appears as a gallery of archetypes, with resonant names like Blossom Sheed and Belle Rothman, whose suffering is less singular and whose knowledge (or failed attempt at knowledge) is less personal.

The Greeks believed that the political self is a philosophical self, someone who turns the world into a question in the hope of identifying what is amenable to political art and what lies beyond it, what is transitory and what is permanent. While the Greeks were assured of an ongoing, often aristocratic physical space for that reflection, the modern world finds that space in the ser-

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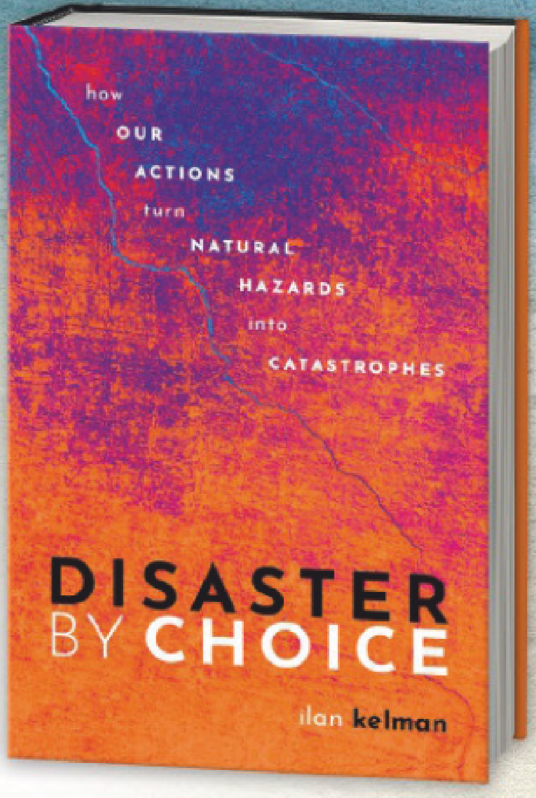
FOR EVERY READER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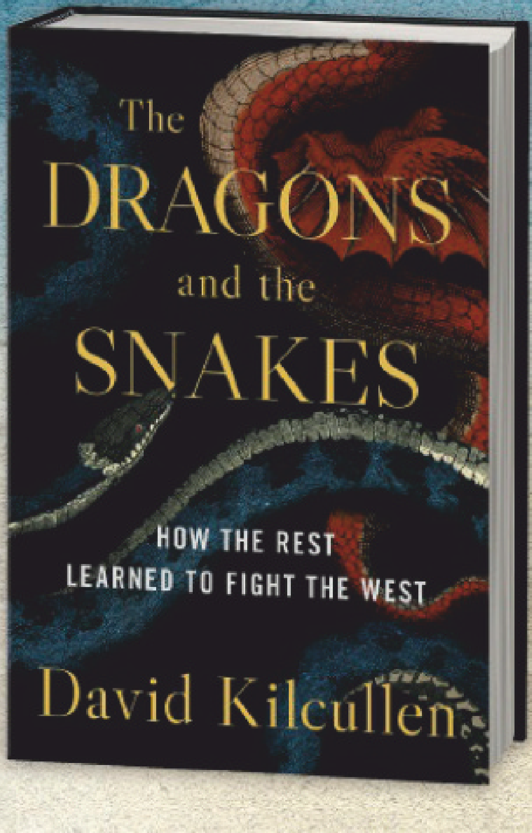
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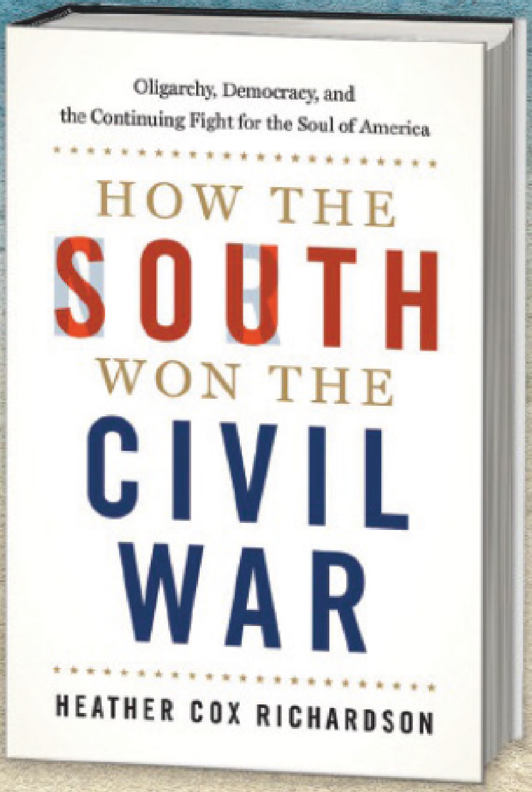
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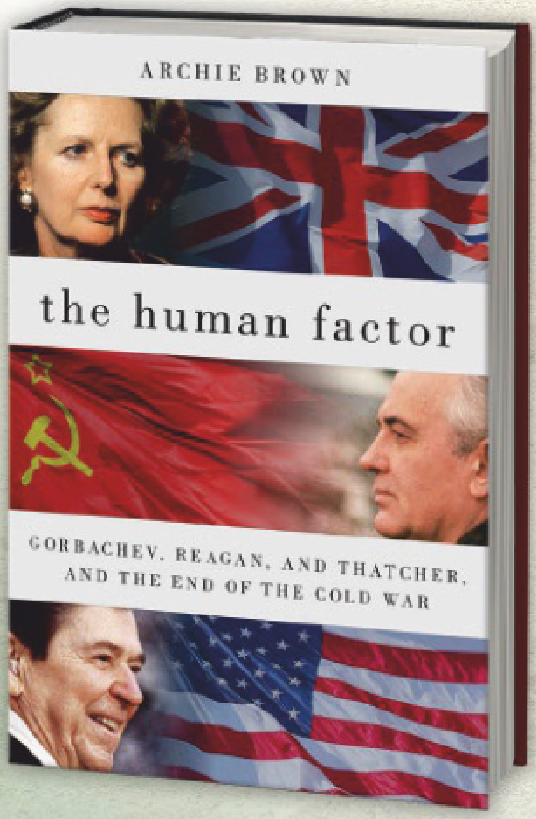
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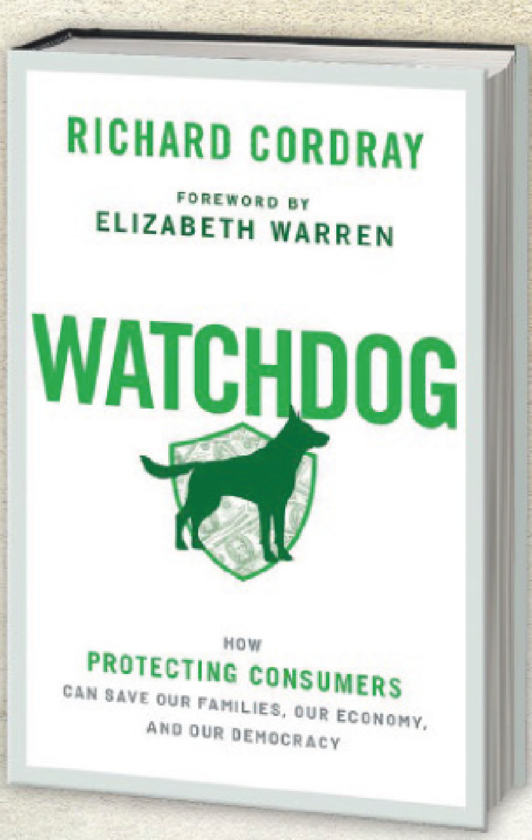
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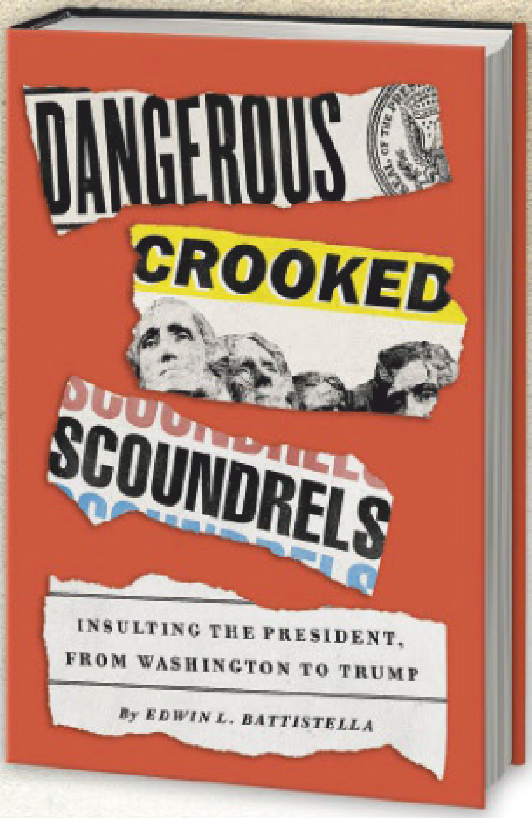
DANGEROUS
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INSULTING THE PRESIDENT, FROM WASHINGTON TO TRUMP
By EDWIN L. BATTISTELLA

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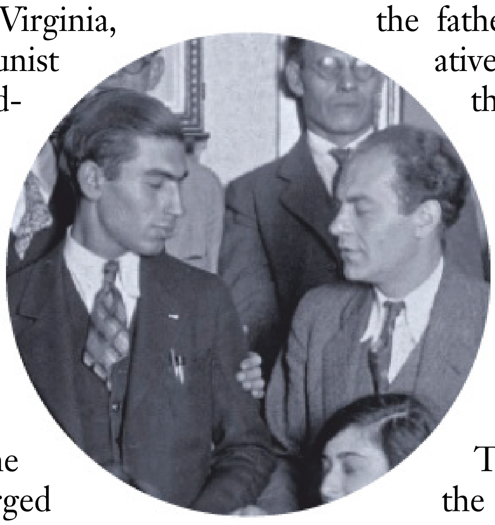
endipity of subaltern struggle. In the newly liberated zones of the decolonized world, people once again could, as Fanon put it, ask a set of "theoretical questions." Schooled in a power they never thought they possessed, they could now begin to wonder, "Why did certain regions never see an orange before the war of liberation, whereas thousands of tons were shipped annually; why had so many Algerians never seen grapes, whereas millions of grapes were dispatched for the enjoyment of Europeans?"

So it goes with Gornick's communists. One woman was obsessed with the question of why people are poor. Initially, she was alone with her thoughts; her husband refused to speculate about it with her, so she walked out on him and her child. But then she discovered that she could ask such questions in the party, and not only that: She could ask such questions in concert, sometimes with the immediacy of the Greeks but more often in the mediated spaces of modern politics. "There I was in West Virginia, for Chrissake," one communist tells Gornick, but by reading the *Daily Worker* and attending party meetings, "I knew what was going on in New York, Moscow, Hungary." Communism created a different agora on a different scale. It traversed the world, and it made work and the workplace—topics so charged for the Greeks that they approached them only with the greatest trepidation and confusion—the centerpieces of reflection and action. But communism also offered the closest approximation to the ancient intimacy between philosophy and politics the modern world has seen. "Marx was their Socrates," writes Gornick, "the Party was their Plato, world socialism their Athens."



Toward the end of *Republic*, the perfect city deteriorates into a variety of lesser regimes. People begin to care more for their own wealth and power than the well-being of the whole. The rot sets in with the family, where an alliance of ambition between sons and mothers conspires against the father who struggles, virtuously if haplessly, to hold on to civic values. If Platonic politics elicits an ever-wider consciousness of worlds beyond one's own, the family sustains a competing enterprise, sapping the public of its civic energy. This was not the cause of communism's undoing. But Gornick still locates a troubled family romance at the center of her book, one that focuses on the dyad between fathers and daughters.

Romance begins with a memory of Gornick's father working hard all day and the sacred place of that work in the family lore. When she was 13, her father died. In 1956, Khrushchev revealed Stalin's crimes, and a twentysomething Gornick finds herself confronting her ambivalently left-wing mother and still-committed communist aunt; neither is willing to denounce Stalin or the Soviet Union. Her aunt responds with the most desperate curse she can imagine: "Louie Gornick must be turning over in his grave, that his daughter has become a Red-baiter."

Fathers figure in many of the stories Gornick hears from the women she interviews. Some are remembered as inspirations, loving examples of proletarian virtue that the daughters try to honor in their party work. Others are remembered as tyrants whom these women have to overthrow in order to become their communist selves. But whether the fathers' contributions are negative or positive—and most of the stories here are positive—they are a critical element in the political formation of their daughters. "Oh, these Communist women and their fathers!" Gornick writes. She dedicates the book "to the memory of Louis Gornick." That, it turns out, may be the real romance of American communism.

But if the bond between fathers and daughters is a romance, it is also a threat. The promise of the communist experience was, in part, the offer of a new identity that would unfasten ties of kinship and family. Not only would the party become the "overriding element of identity, the one which subsumed all others," but it would also be an identity that men and women could partake in equally. All that mattered was doing the work. It didn't matter if the work was high or low, intellectual or manual; all work had "the same value," as long as it contributed to the cause. What these stories of fathers and daughters reveal, then, is not just the differential impact of gender on self—Gornick shows that the inspiration of the father in the family does not always mitigate the subordination of the daughter in the party—but the persistence of competing forms of identity as well, including, as Benjamin Nathans wrote in the *New York Review of Books* several years ago, the most ancient one of all: the family.

In Ernst Lubitsch's 1939 film *Ninotchka*, three Soviet officials are sent to Paris on a mission. But instead of doing the work, they're bewitched and bourgeoised by the City of Lights. They drink, they dance, they stay out late. Moscow dispatches an envoy to set the rogues straight. They anxiously await the envoy's arrival at the train station. When they discover the envoy is a striking woman nicknamed Ninotchka (played by Greta Garbo), they're enchanted. A "lady comrade!" one exclaims. But Ninotchka is not amused. "Don't make an issue of my womanhood," she tells them. "We're here for work, all of us."

That struggle—between an identity based on gender (or nation, race, or class) and the solidarity of doing the work—is at the heart of Jodi Dean's *Comrade*. One of the most innovative and imaginative political theorists on the contemporary scene, Dean uses this scene in *Ninotchka* and a thoughtfully curated library of other texts, from the writings of the Soviet avant-garde to oral histories of the Black Belt, to argue for a communism that is stringent yet pleasurable, joyous yet disciplined. Like Ninotchka, Dean's here for the work. Like Lubitsch, she makes it fun.

Comrade is part of a trilogy of texts Dean has written over the past decade on the political theory of communism. In *The Communist Horizon*, she identified the transcendence of capitalism as the ambit of the left's actions. In *Crowds and Party*, she located those actions in the party form. In *Comrade*, she examines the relation between members of the party. That relation creates two force fields. The first lies between members of the party, where a regulative ideal of being a "good comrade" not only governs the actions of each but also binds the actions of all. That binding creates a massive amount of power, which then projects a second force field—against the agents and institutions of capitalism that comrades seek to overthrow. The attraction of the first force field is necessary for the repulsion of the second. Seasoned union organizers know the truth of these force fields all too well; as Dean shows, so did anti-communists like George Orwell. Yet it is a truth many on the left ignore or evade. "If the left is as committed to radical change as we claim," Dean insists, "we have to be comrades."

All politics require a space—a place where people can assemble, deliberate, and if necessary, move—and domains of action, which may include the economy, religion, sexuality, health, and more. What makes comrades unique is that it is the relationship among them that creates both types of space: where they assemble and what they assemble for.

The word "comrade," Dean explains, "derives from camera, the Latin word for room, chamber, and vault." (Much like "cadre," from the Latin *quadrum*, or square.) Rooms and vaults can be identical and easily reproducible. They provide cover or shelter. They differentiate those within from those without. Comrades create all of these effects by their affect, "a closeness, an intensity of feeling and expectation of solidarity," and by their activity. Whereas work in a capitalist society is sustained by the coercion of the market, the work of comrades is powered by their commitment to one another, which derives from their close quarters (psychically speaking) and their commitment to the task at hand. The two commitments are mutually reinforcing. "One *wants* to do political work," Dean writes, because of one's attachment to one's comrades, and one is attached to one's comrades because one wants to do the work.

Yet comradeship exceeds those affects and attachments. It must, for our sympathies are momentary, our purposes inchoate. Sometimes we fly to the assemblies, ready to do the work of the collective; other times, we laze about at home, succumbing to other desires or hesitation about our aims. Comradeship turns longing into intention and sustains that intention after the originating rush has dissipated. Comradeship extends the life of the crowd. It fulfills the function that labor historians have ascribed to the best union bureaucracies, which prolong solidarity after the strike, and that Arendt ascribed to constitutions, which institutionalize the aims and ambitions of the revolutionary moment after that moment has ceased. Comradeship does that work without the law or the state. It is instead an "ego ideal," to use Dean's Freudian language, maintained by the comrades themselves.

That attempt to create a political space without relying on the law or the state is where we find the most intense unity of the ancients in all their outwardness and the moderns in all their inwardness. It is also where communism—and left politics in general—is most vulnerable to criticism and complaint.

The effort of comrades to create and sustain a public space entirely through the psychic mechanisms of the ego ideal puts tremendous, almost inhuman pressure on them and their work. Without the customary supports of public life—whether the institutions of the state (after communism comes into power is a different story) or familiar sources of identity and attachment—comrades must ensure that each and every waking hour of their lives is dedicated to the common work of comrades. It is a demanding and unforgiving ideal, for much is at stake in any one person's withdrawal from it. Yes, the work is performed in common with comrades, and the force field between them is mighty in its effects. Yet the force field is vulnerable to the competing energy of other forms of identification and attachment.

Our other identities and attachments don't simply disappear because the comrade declares them gone. They constantly clamor for our attention. Conversely, if those identities and attachments don't sap the comrade of her energy and commitment, they may become all too tempting substitutes for the true work of comradeship. How many communists and leftists have taken this shortcut, forsaking political argument for simpleminded appeals to a worker's identity or to national citizenship or gender or ethnic affiliation as the basis for action? How many activists have spoken those words of promise and threat—"You're one of us"—that are so resonant in families yet so dangerous to politics? Tribalism comes in many varieties, and it would be foolish to think the comrade is not immune to its calls.

That moment of Ninotchka's arrival in the Paris train station offers Dean another instructive mise-en-scène. As the three Soviets scan the platform, wondering who the comrade from Moscow might be, they spy a passenger who fits their expectations. They're just about to extend a welcome when the passenger greets someone else, with a salute of "Heil Hitler." The Soviets freeze. "That's not him," one of them says. Their mistake is productive for Dean. They're assuming the comrade is a specifiable type—a gender, a face, a look—but comrades are "generic"; they don't look like anyone or anything. They don't have a specific identity. Comrades can be anybody, though not, Dean adds wryly, with a nod to that fascist, everybody. Anybody can do the work, and anyone who does the work will enjoy the solidarity of comrades. "We don't even need to know each other's names," an activist tells her. "We're comrades."

The solidarity of political work is not a subject well examined in the canonical literature of politics—Weber, one of the few theorists to think about politics as work, focused almost exclusively on charismatic leaders, not collectives—but it is a concern of vital interest to the left. Socialists of varying stripes have often looked to the workplace (or warfare) as laboratories of solidarity. So taken by the coordinated nature of modern work were the Saint-Simonians, for example, that they designed vests with buttons in the back so that no one could dress without the cooperation of others. In the physicality of concerted labor, many a socialist has caught a glimpse of a more solidaristic future.

Dean's model derives from neither the workplace nor warfare but from the political work and testimony of communists themselves, which yields an eclectic blend of voices—part republican, part romantic. On the basis of that testimony, she concludes that comradeship enables us to take on the perspective of others, to see our actions "through their eyes," which "remakes the place from which one sees." That enlarged perspective has been the calling card of thinkers ranging from Rousseau and Kant to Arendt and Habermas. Whereas these thinkers often find that perspective in the legislative institutions of the state or the organs of public opinion or the heroic moments of civic action, Dean locates it, as does Gornick, in the slow boring of hard boards, in the work of politics that escapes the limelight but where comrades dedicate themselves to a task and hold themselves accountable to its completion.

Through that work, comrades can come to experience the joy of collective action and the enjoyment of one another. The joy is so intense that it spills onto other entities. Drawing on the work of artists and writers from the early Soviet avant-garde, which she compares to the poetry of Whitman, Dean describes an extension of ecstasy to "comrade objects" and "comrade things." When the "love and respect" among comrades is "so great that it can't be contained in human relations," it "spans to include insects and galaxies (bees and stars)."

Up to the 1990s, Dean's commitment to the generic nature of the comrade would have raised the hackles of those in the liberal center and on the right, who would have seen it as a threat to the individual. Today, it will press buttons for some on the left, who will see it as a

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challenge to the claims of certain forms of identity. The comrade, Dean insists, seeks to equalize relationships across race, class, nation, religion, ethnicity, and gender. It creates a sameness, the sameness of those who are doing the work. The only difference that remains salient is between those who are on one side of the struggle and those who are on the opposite side. The mobility of that metaphor—of being on one side or the other—allows Dean to insist on forms of affiliation and attachment that are neither identitarian nor exclusive. Anyone can be a comrade; all one has to do is move to the other side. Though this quote from a *Washington Post* report on the Bernie Sanders campaign arrived too late for Dean to use, it offers a helpful instantiation of her claim: "Sanders is a candidate who presents himself less as a personality than a conduit for a movement. And in the Bernie bubble, [Alexandria] Ocasio-Cortez is seen as the future of the movement embodied. What makes her so effective as a surrogate, beyond her star power, is that if you campaign on electing a movement rather [than] a person, there's no difference between hearing the message from the 78-year-old white male candidate or his 30-year-old Latina supporter."

The comrade, Dean makes clear, is not a description but an ideal. Comrades do not eliminate gender or race or conflicts. But what they can do is name a common horizon; they can state a destination to which they are collectively heading, an aim toward which they are working. Comradeship is the announcement of another way of being: not one in which difference is eliminated but in which it becomes the stuff of political art, of mediating conflicts in order to do the work for which all have come. Though it is anarchists who are best known for emphasizing the prefigurative elements of radical politics—arguing that how we do the work now will shape the society to come—Dean's analysis also has a prefigurative element, with Lenin as its seer. The discipline of comrades, he said, "is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism." The comrade contains within herself the defeat of the old regime.

The left has good reason to be wary of the stern antinomies of the comrade. The freedom that goes by the name of discipline, the suppression of difference in the name of solidarity, the words of emancipation as window dressing for authoritarian constraint—we've been down this road before. We know where it ends, and neither Gornick nor Dean denies that ending. Nor do they provide an easy way around or out of it.

Gornick interprets the tragedy of communism through Greek myth. Helen awakens in Paris an intense love, one he never knew before. He is turned outward, directed to another soul in a way he is not accustomed to. He becomes larger than himself. Then the love takes on a life of its own, eclipsing its object. Love becomes the object, the feeling and need; Helen disappears from view. All manner of mayhem and destruction follow. Dean interprets the tragedy through psychoanalysis: The healthy ego ideal of the comrade becomes the ravenous superego. In the same way that the superego feeds off the transgressions of the id, growing ever more powerful from the punishment of impurity, so do comrades turn inward, generating a feeding frenzy of their own. Collective power, once a source of freedom, becomes a prison.

There's a reason Gornick and Dean turn to myth and psychoanalysis, respectively. Each, in its way, is a story of unhappy endings, in which the conclusion is written from the start. Yet even if we don't head down the path of authoritarian communism, even if we avoid that unhappy ending, we're still left with other bad endings that neither psychoanalysis nor myth can account for. Not only has capitalism run rampant since the fall of communism, and not only has the left yet to find a replacement for the parties and movements that once created socialism in all its varieties, but even the contemporary left has not left behind the challenge of reconciling freedom and constraint.

Today, many on the left deploy a robust vocabulary of personal liberty—of expression, relationships, difference—that would have been simply unthinkable to cadres past, whether in communist Eastern Europe or working-class Detroit. At the same time, some on the left are ready, at least online, to enforce norms of mutual respect and personal dignity through practices of ostracism and collective shaming. This is hardly a criticism of the left, and nowhere do these sanctions rise to the level of repression claimed by the liberal center and the right. It is simply a recognition of the challenge the left faces: how to steer toward emancipation with tools that necessarily involve some element of discipline and constraint.

In the past, the left brought together these elements of freedom and constraint. It had no choice. Whether it was contesting for state power or wielding that power, the left was serious about its purposes. It intended to do the work. It sought to generate those force fields. It imposed discipline, and by doing so, it created power.

Today's left is more hesitant, for reasons good and bad, about state power. It is legitimately fearful of repeating the repression of the past; it is understandably, if less legitimately, fearful of taking on the responsibility—and judgment of history—that power entails. As a result, the left struggles to generate those force fields, seeking the warmth of solidarity without the cold and sometimes cruel poles of attraction and repulsion that sustain it.

This hesitation has liberated the left from the need to reconcile freedom and constraint. But it has also left it without power. At some point, that may change. The left may become intentional; it may become dangerous. If it does, these questions of freedom and discipline will once again become salient. For better and for worse. ■

SARAH BROOM IN HER FAMILY'S LIVING ROOM MIRROR (© SARAH M. BROOM AND THE BROOM FAMILY)

WHAT WAS SAVED

Sarah Broom's New Orleans saga

by LOVIA GYARKYE

Archives have always been contested spaces. Who and what gets recorded often has more to do with those in power than it does those without it. Historians have wrestled with this fact for decades, trying to address the assumed neutrality of the political and cultural institutions responsible for recording our past. In the last 40 years, a wave of cultural and social historians, mostly writing about the black Atlantic, have done so by finding new archives to mine, uncovering those voices left in the margins. In his sweeping history, *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot put forth a powerful indictment of what historians of the Atlantic world have chosen to ignore (the Haitian Revolution, slave revolts) or commemorate (Christopher Columbus, the American Revolution) and offered a counter-history. In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, her study of African American women novelists, Hazel Carby rewrote 19th and 20th century literary history, forcing readers to focus on the fiction of black women intellectuals. And in her classic essay "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman exhumed ignored slave archives and used what she termed "critical fabulation" (the process of closing gaps in the archives) to retell the story of a black woman's murder aboard a slave ship. "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?" Hartman asked. "How does one listen for the groans and cries, the undecipherable songs, the crackle of fire in the cane fields, the laments for the dead, and the shouts of victory, and then assign words to all of it?"

Though many of these historians focused on slavery, their insights and methodologies have informed a new generation of writers as they examine the wider history of being black in America. Sarah M. Broom, a contributor to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times Magazine*, deploys these archival techniques in *The Yellow House*, a memoir that reconstructs not only her family's history in New Orleans but also that larger arc of the black experience in the United States. Her sources range from maps and pamphlets to interviews and journal entries. But perhaps most compellingly, one of her primary texts is the titular house in which she and her siblings grew up.

The Yellow House has garnered well-deserved praise; it won a National Book Award and appeared on several "best of the year" lists. More than just a narrative about a family, it is a masterpiece of personal and social history, examining the devastating consequences of decades of government neglect and revealing the very weak foundations on which the American dream rests. Using oral history, forgotten pieces of journalism, photographs, deeds, and other artifacts, *The Yellow House* helps to fill in those painful "silent leaps," as Broom puts it, that fragment the history of her family and her home of New Orleans East.

By giving her family members space to tell their stories, Broom does far more than help knit this history back together. Like

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Hartman, she also poses a set of vexing questions: How do you reconstruct the history of a place and a people whose importance has been deemed negligible (at best) by those in power? How do you use the archives to write the narrative of a life (or in this case, lives) without replicating the initial violence?

The story of *The Yellow House* begins with a map of New Orleans East. It's a special one: What it lacks in visual elements (there are none), it makes up for in the detailed and considered way Broom describes the location of her childhood home. She begins by asking readers to envision an aerial photograph, in which Carl, one of her 11 siblings, tends a lot where a house once stood. "I can see him there now, in my mind's eye, silent and holding a beer," she writes. "Babysitting ruins." From there, she pulls her focus back and considers the neighborhood, once a prosperous working-class community. These days, however, when visitors get off the highway, they pass "run-down apartment complexes" and "the foundation that once held a tire shop that used to be a laundromat," among other relics. She then asks us to imagine how common this story is in all of New Orleans, in Louisiana, in the South, and in the United States. As Broom zooms out, it becomes apparent that her tale won't be about just one house; it will also tackle the burden of myths and interrogate who owns particular narratives, both local and regional.

Broom starts with the story of how her family ended up in New Orleans East. Her grandmother Amelia, whom everyone called Lolo, moved from St. Rose, Louisiana, to New Orleans to live with her aunt after her mother disappeared. There Lolo gave birth to Broom's mother, Ivory Mae, who grew up to marry her childhood sweetheart, Edward Webb. Their marriage ended abruptly when he died during Army basic training. The circumstances were tragic and murky, as was often the case for black families who lost a loved one in the armed services, but Ivory Mae found a way to carry on and eventually remarried, this time to Simon Broom, a man twice her age. In 1961, Ivory Mae purchased a home in New Orleans East, a neighborhood of 40,000 acres of wetland developed by real estate barons.

Bounded on one side by the Industrial Canal, New Orleans East was always at high risk of flooding. In the 1960s it thrived nevertheless: Soon a NASA plant (a symbol of the expansive space age) arrived, as well as companies like Folgers Coffee. The danger of the wetlands only added to the myth. Like the city it was a part of, New Orleans East would defy its natural limitations. Although built on a "cypress swamp, its ground too soft to support trees or the weight of three humans," Broom writes, it was promoted as "a 'Model City…taking form within an old and glamorous one' that if successful would have made New Orleans 'the brightest spot in the South, the envy of every land-shy community in America.'"

The Yellow House
A Memoir
By Sarah M. Broom
Grove Press. 376 pp. $26

The new home, a narrow shotgun building originally painted light green, held a special place in Ivory Mae's heart, even if it "was sinking in the back," Broom writes. "The structure needed work," Ivory Mae recalled to her daughter, and the "land was almost wild, with grass between the houses." But the house represented "beginnings," and with Simon, she "made it new," eventually filling it with 12 children, who she fervently hoped would inherit it one day. "I feel like everybody grown up should have a legacy, like a house or something," Ivory Mae explained, "to leave for the next generation."

This legacy, however, was sorely beset by one ecological and economic crisis after another. In 1965, less than a year after Ivory Mae and Simon moved in, Hurricane Betsy hit, sowing the seeds for increased divestment in New Orleans. Broom documents how the state's response to the hurricane reinforced the locals' distrust of the authorities, who in the wake of the storm left the city's poorest residents to become "sacrificial lambs."

Bringing that story into the present, Broom considers what happened to these sacrificial lambs, including her mother, father, and siblings. Simon died in 1980 at the age of 56, when Broom was less than a year old. By the time she came of age, most of her siblings had left the Yellow House and New Orleans East for marriage, work, or other reasons. Meanwhile, the house slowly turned from a potential legacy into a burden. The ceiling had unfinished beams, the wood beneath the yellow siding decayed, and the faucets in the bathroom broke. Ivory Mae was dedicated to maintaining a good home; she bought nice furniture and made repairs where she could. But the demands of motherhood, coupled with limited resources—most of which were put toward Broom's education—made it impossible to keep up. Soon the house became "Ivory Mae's thirteenth and most unruly child."

Broom's mother faced all sorts of other challenges as well. Ivory Mae's mom developed Alzheimer's; one of her sons battled a drug addiction and turned the Yellow House into a site for his pilfering. Another son, now divorced, returns to the Yellow House and becomes something like its caretaker. The children, now scattered across the South, initiate home repair plans and try to pay for them, without much success in either case. Broom, whose teenage years feel like dramatic passages in a musical score, finds refuge in her mind and in writing, and she, too, eventually escapes, moving to Texas to study anthropology and journalism. She returns to the Yellow House only occasionally, and during those brief stints she finds that many of the neighboring homes have now been abandoned, with the locals moving to Gentilly, a middle-class neighborhood across the canal, and entire lots turning into junkyards. The promise of the Yellow House already appeared broken, and yet for Broom and the rest of her family, the worst was still to come.

Broom's strengths as a writer are most obvious when she uses the story of the Yellow House not only to examine her family but also to analyze the history of black Americans in New Orleans. Her method reflects Trouillot's observations about the role of structures in history making. "A castle, a fort, a battlefield, church, all these things bigger than we that we infuse with the reality of past lives, seem to speak of an immensity of which we know little except that we are part of it," he writes. "Too solid to be unmarked, too conspicuous to be candid, they embody the ambiguities of history." Broom's childhood home is far easier to enter: It is made of less solid materials and is still a living site, a vessel for her family's hopes and dreams—of pride of ownership, of building community, and of proof that meritocracy existed. And along with the archives and historical sources that Broom turns to, it is the house that allows her to tell the story of the emotional as well as social and economic consequences of these hopes going unfulfilled—not just for her family but for the city as a whole. "Unrealized dreams could pummel you if you weren't careful," she observes of their multiple attempts to repair and maintain the Yellow House. But it is with the arrival of Hurricane Katrina that the full scope of the pummeling becomes clear. And it is during the storm and its aftermath that the different threads of her story come together and the larger story of New Orleans, the South, and the United States comes into focus.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans with a fury. It was one of the deadliest and costliest storms in US history. It killed more than 1,800 people and damaged more than 70 percent of the homes in New Orleans, costing the federal government billions of dollars. It's been 15 years since Katrina, and we are still trying to understand its impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. The storm's destructiveness, as Broom meticulously shows, was not a single tragic event but rather a series of reverberations felt most acutely during the city's crawl toward recovery.

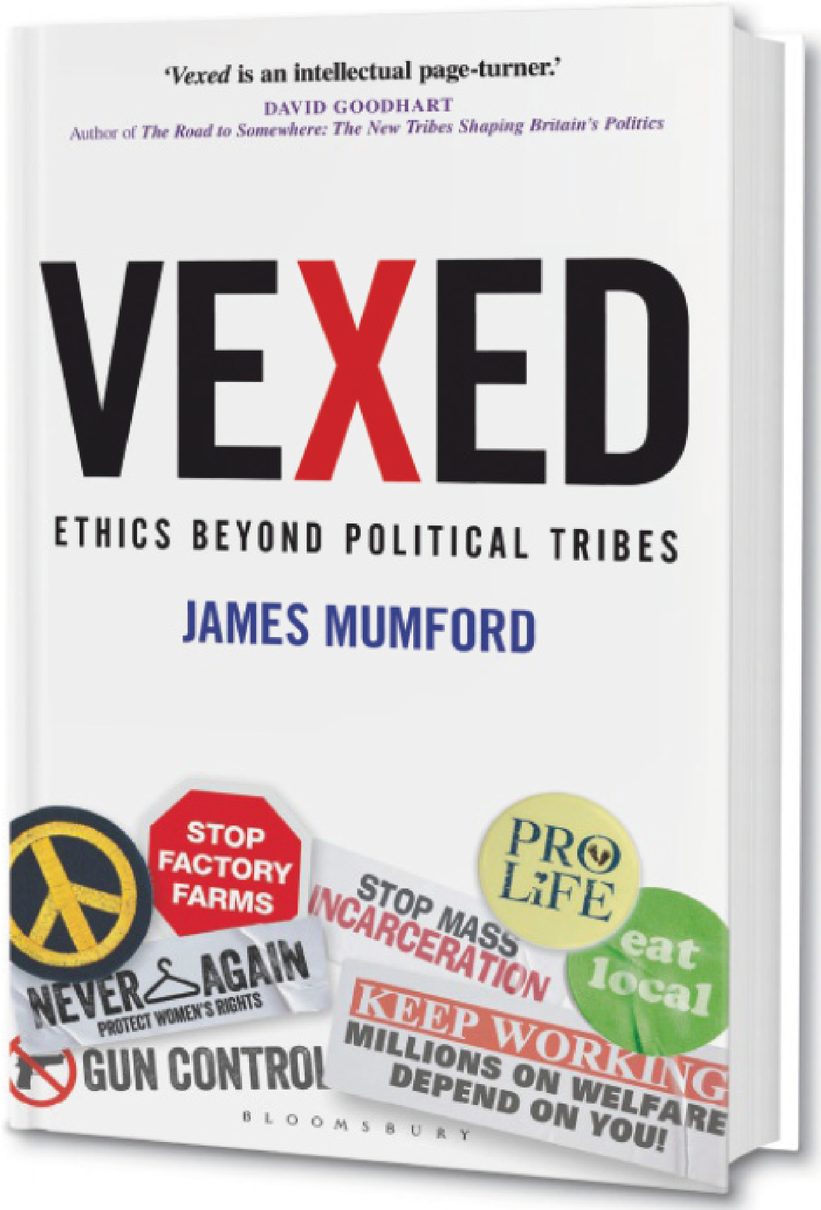
Broom and her family returned to the Yellow House in October of 2005, a little more than a month after the storm. It was a pilgrimage of sorts, to see how their home had become something else entirely. What they found was horrifying. "The house looked as though a force, furious and mighty, crouching underneath, had lifted it from its foundation and thrown it slightly left," Broom recalls. "The front door sat wide open; a skinny tree angled its way inside." Family members stood near the lot, some with face masks on, and stared at the home that had raised them all, in one way or another. "We did not enter," she writes, "even though the house we knew beckoned."

Ivory Mae remained in the car, unable to bear witness. Soon the city declared the site a "red danger," a designation for properties it planned to demolish. Ivory Mae applied to Road Home, a $10 billion rebuilding program that gave cash grants to homeowners looking to repair or sell property damaged by Katrina, but her application languished in a maze of bureaucratic negligence and wasn't finalized until 2016—more than a decade after the hurricane. By that point, Ivory Mae had moved into her mother's home in St. Rose. Eventually the application was approved, and Ivory Mae signed away the land that the Yellow House sat on for a small grant. The lot, which she'd owned for more than 50 years and which Carl now tended, would be "auctioned off to become something else."

Broom's intimate relationship with New Orleans only amplifies her sense of the importance of her role as a documentarian. For her, what happened to the city in the wake of Katrina was personal; what she finds is that nearly all of the dysfunction that plagued New Orleans after the storm had existed long before. A majority of the residents who had been displaced—whose services had yet to be restored and who remained outsiders in their own city—were black. And when it came to the recovery, "black people were more likely than whites to receive Road Home grants based on premarket values lower than the actual cost to repair their houses." The question of whom New Orleans belongs to is one that undergirds much of the second half of *The Yellow House*, as Broom ventures to make her own claim to the city.

The power of her book comes from just how successfully she navigates what it means to assert that claim and own a narrative at once unique to her family and yet common to many others in New Orleans. Sometimes her narrative deviates from its main story to the author's existential questions and self-development in ways that can feel jarring. But that, too, is part of the point. One cannot write a memoir without a thorough, if sometimes awkward, self-interrogation. And throughout, Broom makes sure that we keep our eye on the book's true protagonist: the yellow house. The book ends much as it begins, with her brother Carl keeping watch over the lot where the house once stood, mowing the lawn and sitting at a now ruined dining table. "Cutting grass could seem so simple an act," she writes. But it is one freighted with a complex history. Joining her brother, Broom also mows the lawn—a tender gesture that ultimately marks the boundary of what was lost as much as what was saved. ■

WHY SHOULD BELIEVING STRONGLY ABOUT ONE TOPIC MEAN THE AUTOMATIC ADOPTION OF SO MANY OTHERS?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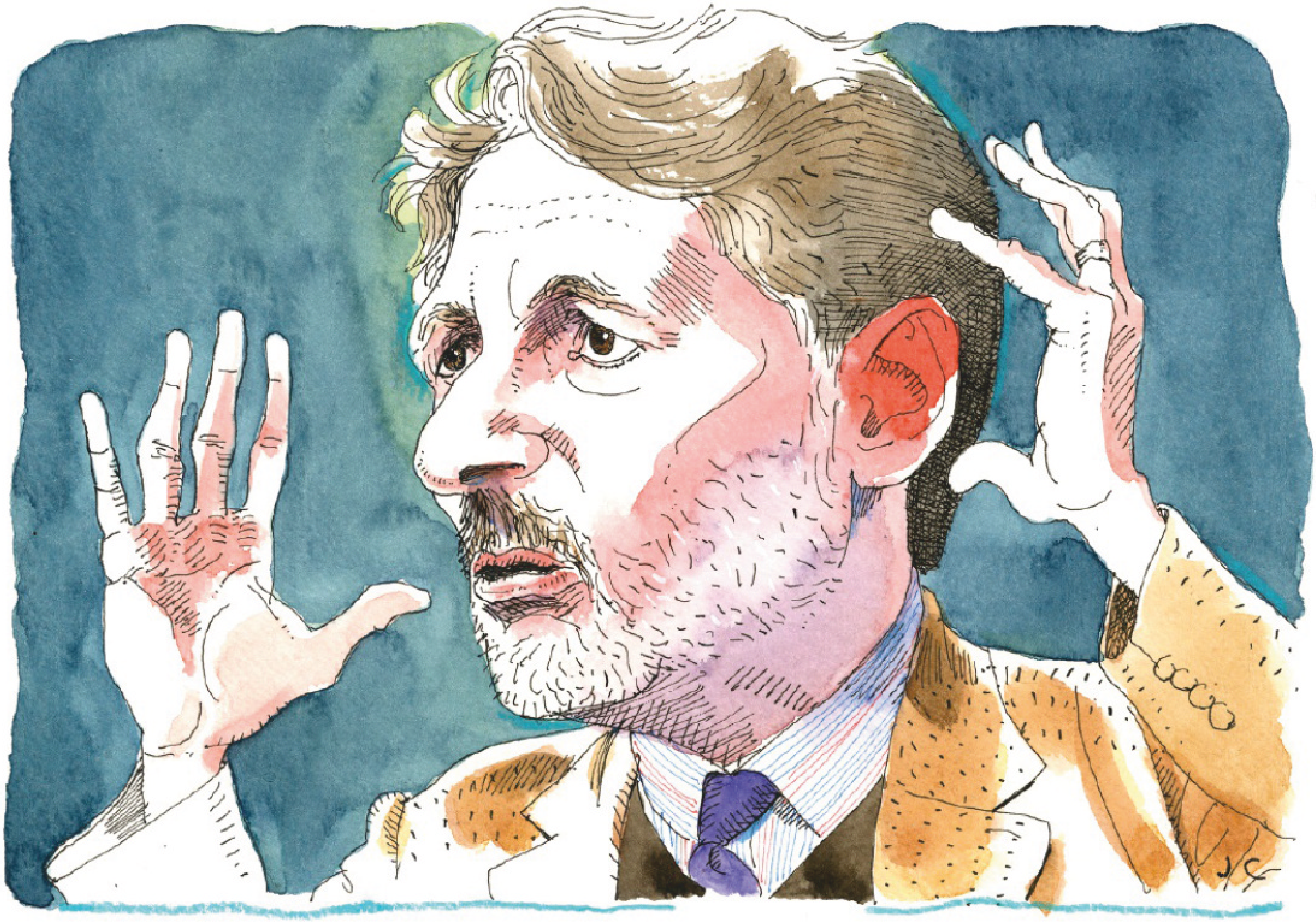

THE WORLDLY EXILE

Edward Said's life and afterlives

by RASHID KHALIDI

Seventeen years after his death, Edward Said remains a powerful intellectual presence in academic and public discourse, a fact attested to by the appearance of two important new books. *After Said*, edited by Bashir Abu-Manneh, offers assessments of Said's vast body of scholarship by a dozen noted writers and academics. *The Selected Works of Edward Said, 1966–2006*, edited by Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, two former students, is an expanded version of *The Edward Said Reader*, which was published a few years before his death in 2003. The *Reader* offered us a full picture of Said's breadth and influence as a public intellectual; the new collection is more than 150 pages longer and includes eight essays that didn't appear in the earlier volume, plus a new preface and an expanded introduction. The newly included essays range from overtly political sallies to reflective meditations on the "late style" in music and literature that were published posthumously. Some of them, like "Freud and the Non-European," reflect concerns that preoccupied him toward the end of his life and are among the most complex and subtle of his writings. Others remind us how widely read he was, how broad his interests were, and how penetrating his insights could be. Coupled with the reflections on his major works in *After Said*, they also give the reader a sense of the consistency of his politics, imbued with a universalist and cosmopolitan humanism that sat at the center of his literary and political writings.

It is not surprising that so many people are still reading and grappling with Said's ideas. His extensive oeuvre includes 25 books, many of them monuments in their field, such as *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. He was the founding father of an entire academic domain—postcolonial studies—that has thrived despite a certain critical distance toward it on the part of its putative parent. In his 40 years at Columbia University, Said mentored numerous scholars, many of whom hold prominent

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Rashid Khalidi's most recent book is The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. *He is the Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University.*

ILLUSTRATION BY **JOE CIARDIELLO**

positions today in literature and other departments throughout the Anglo-American academy, and the influence of his scholarship also extends far, leaving its mark on the study of the Middle East, anthropology, and art history. Forty-two years after its publication, his most influential work, *Orientalism*, is still widely taught to undergraduate and graduate students around the world.

Over those four decades, Said became probably the most eminent public intellectual of his generation, producing a wealth of essays, articles, and long interviews (on everything from Middle Eastern politics to classical music and psychoanalysis) and writing for a broad general readership as well as his academic peers. His public involvement ranged from contemporary affairs to debates about the history of empire, but it was most pronounced where Palestine was concerned. Through his writings, his media appearances, and his activism, Said did more than anyone else to make the question of Palestine better understood in North America. Although this advocacy earned him many admirers in the United States and the rest of the world, including among Palestinians, it also earned him powerful enemies in the academy, the media, and elsewhere. Nonetheless, at a distance of nearly two decades since his death, it is clear that their enmity has done little to diminish his legacy or the immediacy and relevance of his ideas.

Edward Said was born in British-ruled Palestine and grew up in Cairo at a time when Egypt was nominally independent. He was initially schooled in an educational system deeply marked by British colonial influence. The name of an elite institution he was expelled from, Victoria College, tells it all, and struggling to fit in, he also spent parts of his youth in Lebanon and Palestine. His well-to-do family lost homes, businesses, and property in Jerusalem as a result of the Nakba in 1948, and although the young Said was somewhat cushioned from the material consequences, these events had a considerable impact on him—as did the neocolonial political, social, and cultural environments in which he grew up.

Said was sent to the United States to complete his high school education at a New England prep school, which he graduated from in 1953. Then he enrolled at Princeton, where he studied under the critic and poet R.P. Blackmur, and completed a PhD at Harvard, writing on his fellow exile Joseph Conrad. Said was, for all intents and purposes, a fairly conventional scholar at that point, winning a coveted appointment in the English and comparative literature department at Columbia in 1963 and publishing a book on Conrad and the autobiographical element in his novels. But world events—in particular the Israeli-Arab War in 1967—marked a transformative moment for him. Witnessing these developments both from afar in New York and in Lebanon during summers with his family, he came to realize the disjuncture between what was happening in the Middle East and how it was depicted in the West. This realization informed nearly all of the work that followed: first with *Orientalism*, published in 1978, and then with *The Question of Palestine* the next year.

After Said

Postcolonial Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century
Edited by Bashir Abu-Manneh
Cambridge University Press. 232 pp. $27.99

The Selected Works of Edward Said, 1966–2006

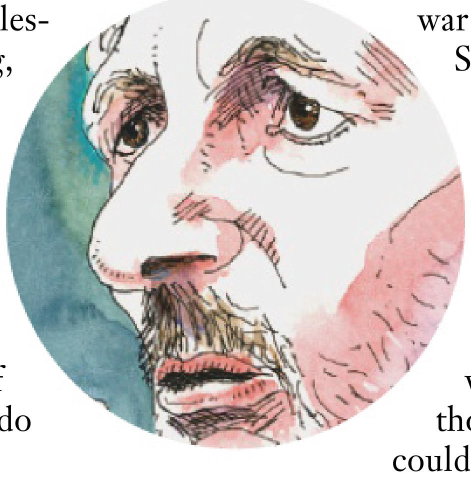
Edited by Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin
Vintage. 656 pp. $18

What made Said's writing so revelatory for nonspecialists was how his arguments broadened our horizons and constantly challenged our assumptions. He did this in person as well—in conversations with friends, in lectures, and in seminars filled with attentive students. My brother, who was a Columbia student, introduced me to Said in the years after 1967 as we all absorbed the shock and the consequences of that year's war. Soon I discovered that as much of a pleasure as it was to read Said, it was an even greater pleasure to listen to him. One was drawn into a wide-ranging conversation about literature, music, philosophy, philology, and politics, all illuminated by the extraordinary sense of urgency that seemed to drive him from very early on. His capacious range and his application of that knowledge to history and politics was inflected by his strong personal commitments, which made his work far richer and more interesting than that of any other theorist or literary scholar then writing in the Anglo-American academy. Part of its lasting appeal, in fact, is that it continues to speak to us in much the same fashion: blending a broad, interdisciplinary humanistic knowledge with attention to pressing global concerns.

Said's 1997 essay "On Lost Causes" in the *Selected Works* offers a wonderful example of this. It progresses from an extended meditation on four late novels by Miguel de Cervantes, Jonathan Swift, Gustave Flaubert, and Thomas Hardy to a coruscating critique of the Oslo Accords as a defeat for the Palestinians, one that led many to believe that Palestine was a lost cause. The essay is suffused with a sense of melancholy: The reader knows that in writing about these authors' novels, Said was likely penning an essay that would count among his own final works. Refracting his disappointment with the outcome of the Palestinian liberation struggle in the late '90s through the grim pessimism of Cervantes, Swift, Flaubert, and Hardy, Said provided a much more illuminating assessment of the post-Oslo landscape than any ordinary political essay could have—and he did so while shining a light on the four novels as well. Very few literary critics and professors of literature wrote like this then, and even fewer do so today.

The best articles in the excellent *After Said* exhibit the same combination of literary fluency and political acuity. Bashir Abu-Manneh's introduction astutely stresses the centrality of politics to Said's criticism and to his entire career—a judgment that is fully borne out by a careful reading of the eight new essays in the *Selected Works*. Abu-Manneh helps us better understand Said's political evolution, noting the impact on him and an entire Arab generation of the 1967 war and how it spurred his turn to overtly political writing on Palestine and the Middle East. Abu-Manneh adds that this impact "marked everything Said did afterward," leading him to become "his generation's most influential cultural critic of empire" and "a defender of the colonized and oppressed," all based on "his firm anti-imperial principles."

This post-1967 awakening constituted a remarkable shift for a conventionally trained literary critic whose first two books, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* and *Beginnings: Invention and Method*, gave little indication of what was to come. Said's new political orientation infuriated many of his contemporaries, in particular those offended by his advocacy for the Palestinian cause and his critique of American imperialism, as well as those who disliked his insistence that if literary criticism and, indeed, humanism were to have value, they would have to be infused with an appreciation of context, worldliness, and the political stakes of all cultural expressions. By demanding that Palestinians be allowed “permission to narrate” their own history, in the words of another of his famous essays, Said challenged a hegemonic narrative fashioned over many decades that replaced Palestine with Israel and entirely ignored or systematically denigrated the Palestinian people. In so doing, Said reopened the question of Palestine, which opponents of Palestinian rights had hoped was permanently closed. They could never forgive him for this, and their hostility pursued him for the rest of his life—and continues to do so beyond the grave.



Although the turning point in Said’s thinking was spurred by the 1967 war, it first became visible in a spate of publications in the late ’70s and early ’80s with the appearance of *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, and *Covering Islam*. In Said’s earlier works, one can discern some of the features that made his later writings so powerful. His early sympathy for and identification with Conrad, for example, was at least partly a recognition by one multilingual exile writing in a language that was not his mother tongue of the similarities in the trajectory of another such exile. Like Conrad, Said sensed himself to be in some way out of place, which was not coincidentally the title of his 1999 memoir. Also like Conrad, Said was intimately aware of the world outside his immediate one. This sense of alienation and worldliness proved to be a powerful combination and allowed him to inhabit a far wider and more diverse set of perspectives than his peers. He could see what others rooted in “the West” often could not—especially about Western culture.

Said’s alienation and worldliness were at the heart of the complexity and richness of his work; they lent him a sharper awareness of and sympathy for other cultures and stirred inside him a pointed disdain for the placid provincialism and monoglot lack of reflection among many leading figures in the American academy. Although he shared the class and educational background of many of his peers, he insisted that we see beyond the parochial bounds of the ivory tower and the self-referential culture of the West. While this critical attitude was expressed most saliently in *Orientalism*, it characterized much of Said’s mature work, both critical and political. In one of his last offerings, “The Return to Philology” (on what he called this “most unmodern” branch of learning), his erudite analysis is informed by a sense of the larger stakes of the specific political moment: the war in Iraq and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s casual dismissal in 1996 of the thousands of Iraqi deaths in that decade as a result of US-mandated sanctions.

Said deftly interlaced philosophy and literature with political critique. Although his political writings could be blunt, even scalding, he most often wielded a sharp scalpel in his criticism and did so with elegance and élan. The best of the essays in *After Said* do likewise, often using literary analysis to make subtle political points. At the same time, they avoid the hagiography that is unfortunately prevalent in many of the works on Said. Both Abu-Manneh’s introduction and Robert Spencer’s “Political Economy and the Iraq War” question the lack of an underpinning in political economy in Said’s writing on imperialism in general and on recent US policy in the Middle East in particular, although they do so while underscoring the lasting value of his interventions.

Similarly, Vivek Chibber’s “The Dual Legacy of *Orientalism*” offers one of the most acute and fair-minded expositions of the flaws in what he nevertheless recognizes as a “great book.” Although he notes the distance between Said’s “profound commitment to humanism, universal rights, secularism, and liberalism” and the disavowal or at least skepticism of postcolonial theory toward these values, Chibber writes that *Orientalism* “prefigured, and hence encouraged, some of the central dogmas of postcolonial studies.” While Said’s analysis brought a sophisticated critique of imperialism to the mainstream, Chibber observes, it fed an approach that undermined that very critique by excising its economic dimensions—a point that serves as one of the key subtexts in this collection. Although Said is one of this era’s fiercest critics of imperialism, missing from his analysis is a grounding in political economy, a failing that robbed his critique of some of its potential force and gave license to his postcolonial followers to move away from Marxism.

Equally penetrating is the analysis by Seamus Deane in his essay on *Culture and Imperialism*. Sympathetic to Said’s commitment to Palestine, to his harsh reading of the depredations of imperialism, and to his opposition to the US war in Iraq, Deane nevertheless traces some of the shortcomings in his ambiguous attitude to anti-colonial violence. Contrasting Said’s views with those of Fanon, Deane points to “a willed mystification about the question of violence” throughout Said’s writings.

Attempting to understand why he was so uncomfortable writing in more direct terms on the vexed question of anti-colonial violence, Deane notes that Said was likely “severely compromised” by living in a country where a virulent bias against Muslims, Arabs, and especially Palestinians had led (and continues to lead) many to invariably code their acts of violence as “terrorism.”

Deane is equally thoughtful in analyzing Said’s intervention in the so-called culture wars toward the end of *Culture and Imperialism*, arguing that by focusing on such a trivial matter, he marred the conclusion of his groundbreaking book. Ultimately, Deane observes wryly, Said’s effort to “woo the American academy by means of culture” into opposing imperialism was as fruitless as “cajoling a cat into altruism.”

If many of the essays in *After Said* involve a sympathetic but often critical engagement with his work, there are several that also extend the power of his insights and political vision. In “Said and the ‘Worlding’ of Nineteenth-Century Fiction,” Lauren Goodlad points out that, as even friendly critics have conceded, *Culture and Imperialism* often disconnects questions of empire from those relating to the globalization of capital, but she then makes a compelling case that the book still performed a major service by helping to “deprovincialize” European literature and culture. Whatever flaws exist in Said’s nonmaterialist understanding of empire—his assertion, for example, that imperialism is driven by an “almost metaphysical obligation to rule”—he still shined a powerful spotlight on a subject that had been absent from most previous studies of European novels. By doing so, he not only challenged a smug Eurocentrism that endures in the academy to this day but also redirected his readers’ attention toward a politics that can help us move past it. As Jeanne Morefield notes in her contribution to the collection, Said sought to foster “a humanism capable of escaping Eurocentrism’s yawning maw,” a liberalism that could confront its tendency to sanction “destruction and death for distant civilians under the banner of a benign imperialism.”

Like Goodlad and Morefield, Joe Cleary makes a persuasive case for what some of Said’s critics miss, with his essay “Said, Postcolonial Studies, and World Literature.” He, too, disparages a significant portion of postcolonial theorizing, siding with Said’s argument that many of its practitioners have proved “far more invested in insider disputes about the minutiae of favored modes of theory than in the worldly socio-intellectual concerns that had provoked the theories in the first place.” While Said’s peers settled “into a phase of institutional consolidation…with a fairly predictable canon of modern Anglophone writers,” Cleary writes, Said, even in the last stages of his illness, “continued to produce searing essays that testified to his undiminished abilities as a politically committed thinker.”

As *After Said* and the *Selected Works* reveal, Said was not only politically committed; he never really stopped arguing. His vision remained, to the end, both worldly and alienated. He insisted that we see past our own national or parochial cultures in order to better understand them. He called on us to expand the narrowness of our moral and political imaginations and to see the world in its entirety as our common home. As an exile as comfortable in New York as in Beirut, Cairo, Paris, or London, he infused his literary style with a cosmopolitan ease and his often urgent politics with a cosmopolitan humanism—a humanism that remains a potent antidote to the cloistered and often nationalist chauvinism that seems to be ascendant even in an age of global crises.

Said’s internationalism and cosmopolitan humanism are perhaps his most important legacies. Human life and its challenges—whether they be pandemics, climate change, perpetual war, or neoliberal policies that impoverish the many to enrich the few—force us past the confines of national or cultural boundaries. One can only imagine how Said would have responded to the malign forces that have sabotaged the effective handling of these ongoing crises. As Saree Makdisi proposes in “Orientalism Today,” “the most appropriate thing” in the face of such folly “would be to read Edward Said all over again, as though for the very first time.”

The *Selected Works* and the essays in *After Said* remind us that it is not enough to produce good ideas and generate critical perspectives today; we must expand the very horizon of our thinking both geographically and morally. Ideas and culture must be fought for not only in the cloistered precincts of academia but also out in the world, in the public arena. That was what Said, while always the consummate academic, did for his entire career, and it remains a vivid example for others—scholars, writers, students, activists, and ordinary citizens. Said wrote about the experience of rereading Freud’s essays:

> That we, different readers from different periods of history, with different cultural backgrounds, should continue to do this…strikes me as nothing less than a vindication of his work’s power to instigate new thought, as well as to illuminate situations that he himself might never have dreamed of.

Much the same can be said of Said. As a literary critic, a teacher, and a political activist, he addressed the world with a passion and commitment that speak to us today. ■

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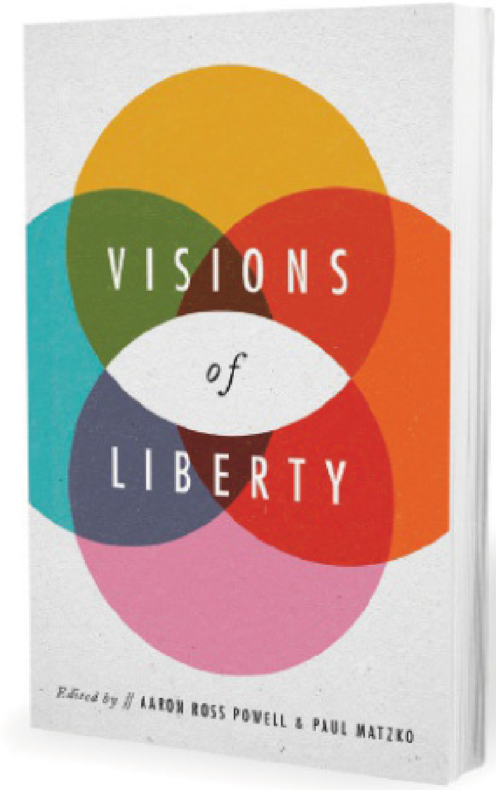

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EDITED BY AARON ROSS POWELL AND PAUL MATZKO

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evasive entrepreneurs
& the future of governance
how innovation improves economies and governments
—
Adam Thierer

Evasive Entrepreneurs & the Future of Governance
BY ADAM THIERER

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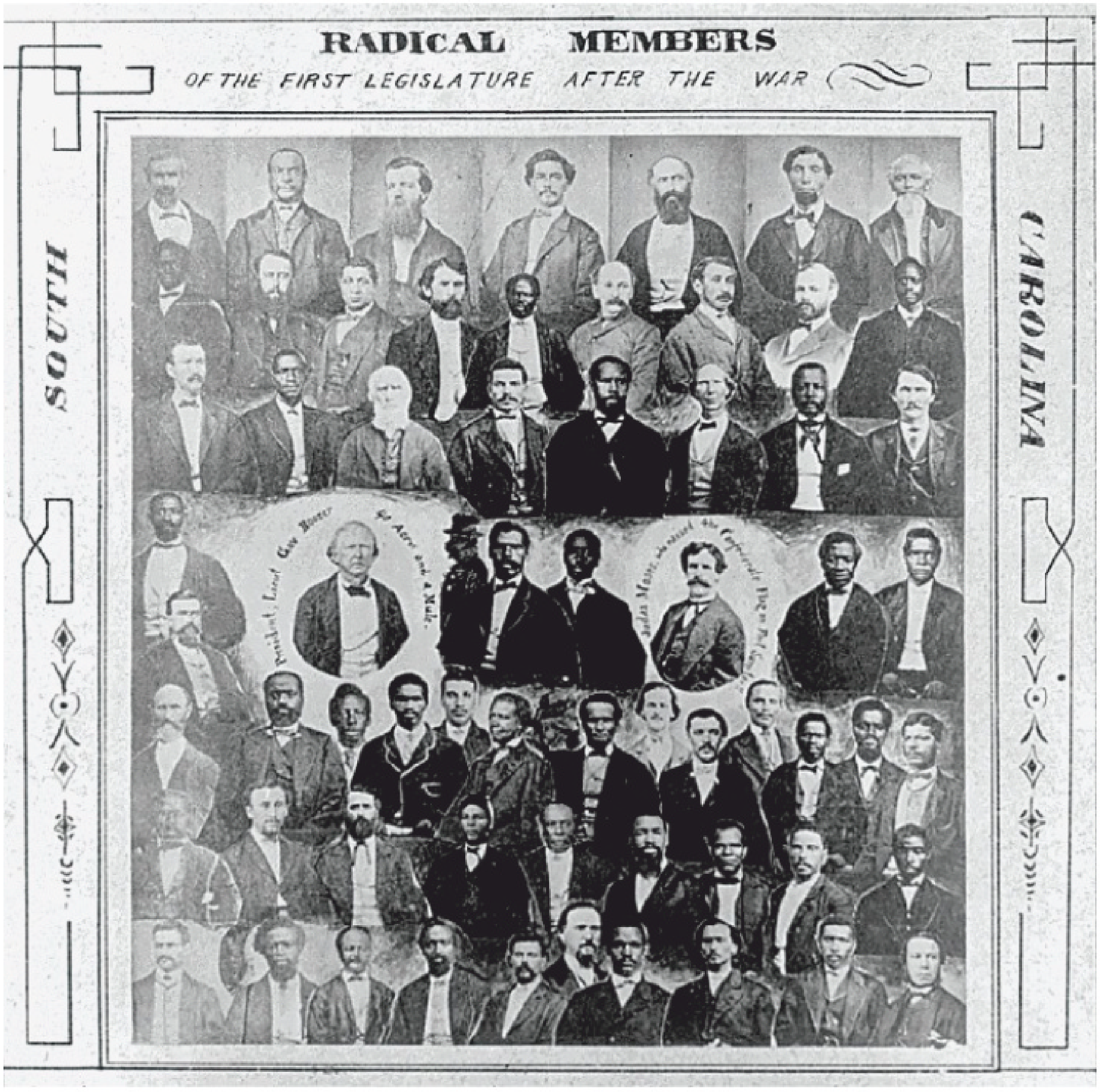
RADICAL MEMBERS
OF THE FIRST LEGISLATURE AFTER THE WAR
SOUTH
CAROLINA

RADICAL MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA LEGISLATURE, 1876 (BUYENLARGE / GETTY IMAGES)

ON THE ROAD TO EMANCIPATION

The making of the Radical Republicans

by ERIC FONER

There is an adage that historians write with (at least) one eye fixed on the present. So it is not surprising that scholars have lately been drawn to the 1850s, a time, much like our own, of intense social and political polarization. Kellie Carter Jackson's recent study of black abolitionists, *Force and Freedom*, focuses on their increasingly vocal calls for slave rebellion. Joanne B. Freeman's *The Field of Blood* relates how nearly every session of Congress from the mid-1830s to the outbreak of civil war in 1861 witnessed members exchanging punches or drawing knives and pistols. In *The War Before the War*, his study of the response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Andrew Delbanco suggests that armed conflict over slavery began years before the attack on Fort Sumter.

Today, political combat is mostly angry rhetoric, not violent deeds, even if our president galvanizes his supporters with thinly veiled invitations to take action against "enemies of the people." But parallels certainly exist between the decade before the Civil War and our time. Then as now, states and localities declared themselves unwilling to cooperate with the federal government's draconian policies for dealing with fugitives seeking to escape oppression (runaway slaves in the 1850s, migrants and refugees today). The current xenophobic claims that immigrants are responsible for illness, crime, and unemployment recall the Know-Nothing Party's similar complaints about Roman Catholics fleeing the Irish famine. Today, as in the past, the Supreme Court has handed down decisions that reflect indifference or out-and-out hostility to the rights of black Americans—*Dred Scott* in 1857, *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013. Today's rallies calling for "reopening" the country, at which participants menacingly display their weapons, bring to mind the 1860 presidential election, when the Republican Party mobilized armed Wide Awake clubs, whose participants paraded through major cities dressed in quasi-military uniforms. And as Richard Kreitner discusses in his forthcoming *Break It Up*, secessionist movements are today proliferating in many parts of the country.

LeeAnna Keith's new book, *When It Was Grand*, also returns to the mid–19th century, this time to consider the history of Radical Republicanism. In doing so, it adds to our understanding of how a rising tide of violence in the 1850s served as a harbinger of the Civil War, a conflict that culminated in the most radical act in American history: the uncompensated abolition of slavery. The author of *The Colfax Massacre*, a highly praised study of the bloodiest act of carnage against African Americans during Reconstruction, Keith makes an important contribution by placing Radicals at the center of these transformative events.

Contemporaries regularly referred to the Radical Republicans as a distinct group in the spectrum of Civil War–era politics. While by the 1850s most Northerners opposed the westward expansion of slavery, the Radicals went further, insisting that antislavery action should take precedence over all other political questions and vehemently opposing any talk of compromise with the South. When the Civil War began, they proclaimed that the Union would not emerge victorious without emancipating and arming the slaves. By the time it ended, they helped put equal civil and political rights for black Americans on the national agenda and then took the lead in enshrining them in laws and the Constitution during Reconstruction.

Scholarly assessments of the Radicals have changed over time, reflecting the evolution of historical interpretation of their era and the changing face of American politics and race relations. Repelled by the mass slaughter of World War I and invested in reconciliation between white Northerners and Southerners, many historians in the 1920s and '30s blamed the Radicals—sometimes called the Jacobins or Vindictives—for whipping up the sectional

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Eric Foner is the DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia. His most recent book is The Second Founding.

hostility that produced a “needless” conflict and for foisting black suffrage on the South during Reconstruction, supposedly leading to an orgy of corruption and misgovernment. To the followers of Charles Beard, who taught that political ideologies serve as masks for the interests of powerful economic groups, the Radicals were the shock troops of a new industrial order. In his influential 1941 book *Lincoln and the Radicals*, the historian T. Harry Williams wrote that “they loved the Negro less for himself than as an instrument with which they might fasten Republican political and economic control upon the South.” In Williams’s view, Abraham Lincoln was a well-meaning but ineffectual leader, outmaneuvered time and again by scheming Radicals.

By the middle of the 20th century, as the modern civil rights revolution swept across the country, historians began to upend this interpretation and take the Radicals’ advocacy of abolition and racial equality at face value. The Radicals, they insisted, were idealists in the best 19th century reform tradition. In *The Radical Republicans* (1969), the first book-length study of the group, Hans L. Trefousse hailed them as “Lincoln’s Vanguard for Racial Justice.” In her more recent and authoritative history of abolitionism, *The Slave’s Cause*, Manisha Sinha goes further. Abolitionists and Radicals Republicans were not simply adjuncts of the Great Emancipator, she argues; they were an independent force whose lofty ideals helped shape the era’s history.

In *When It Was Grand*, Keith offers a capacious, if not entirely coherent, definition of the Civil War–era Radicals. Despite the book’s title (an allusion to the Republicans’ longtime identification as the Grand Old Party), she does not confine her account to individuals working within the political system. Her subjects include not only Radical Republicans but also abolitionists, who refused to participate in politics under a Constitution they deemed irreparably proslavery; Transcendentalists, for whom the abolition of slavery was as much a path to intellectual self-realization as a form of political action; and black activists, who campaigned during the war for racial equality in post-slavery America.

Casting this wide net allows Keith to include a variety of antislavery activists in her narrative. But it remains unclear at times what unites these “culture warriors,” as she calls them, or why particular individuals were chosen for in-depth treatment while others were neglected or ignored. The New England philosophers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and the Rev. Theodore Parker (the last surprisingly described as a Republican “party boss”) all receive considerably more attention, for example, than Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, the leading Radical Republicans in Congress, or less familiar ones such as George W. Julian. Stevens is described as “a wisecracking lawyer said to be secretly married to his black housekeeper”—hardly an adequate description of one of the 19th century’s great egalitarians. Along with Stevens, Julian was a leading advocate of confiscating Southern plantations and distributing the land to former slaves, yet he doesn’t appear at all. Keith also devotes little attention to the Radicals’ ideology and seems unable to decide how much political power they actually enjoyed. At the outset, she claims they “dominated the Republican party,” a considerable exaggeration; elsewhere she makes them seem like political fringe dwellers.

When It Was Grand
The Radical Republican History of the Civil War
By LeeAnna Keith
Hill and Wang. 352 pp. $30

Despite these weaknesses, Keith’s capacious definition of the Radicals enables her to center her story outside the Beltway, which yields significant benefits. Her book is more interested in action than in ideology, more concerned with battles in the streets over fugitive slaves than with election campaigns and congressional legislation. She includes Radical women in her account of how the nation was torn asunder. For example, she devotes considerable attention to Jessie Frémont, a daughter of Senator Thomas Hart Benton and the wife of John C. Frémont, the Republican Party’s first presidential candidate. Jessie Frémont was the political equivalent of a gambler who makes the most of a weak hand. She did her best to defend her husband against (all too accurate) charges of military incompetence when he commanded Union troops in Missouri, and she helped mobilize support for his quixotic effort, in 1864, to replace Lincoln at the head of the Republican ticket.

The first part of *When It Was Grand* deals with the 1850s, when, Keith writes, “a state of war with slavery” already existed. As she points out, in this war before the war, the Radicals utilized whatever weapons they had at their disposal. In response to the Fugitive Slave Act, they defied the Constitution and laws through violent resistance to the capture of runaways. At the same time, they borrowed the states’ rights doctrine usually associated with John C. Calhoun and the South in an attempt to nullify national policy through legal action. Radical judges issued writs of habeas corpus to liberate captured fugitives. Wisconsin’s highest court declared the law unconstitutional, a ruling overturned by the US Supreme Court. The fugitive issue, Keith argues, led many Northerners to insist that what Senator William H. Seward of New York called a “higher law” justified resistance to man-made statutes.

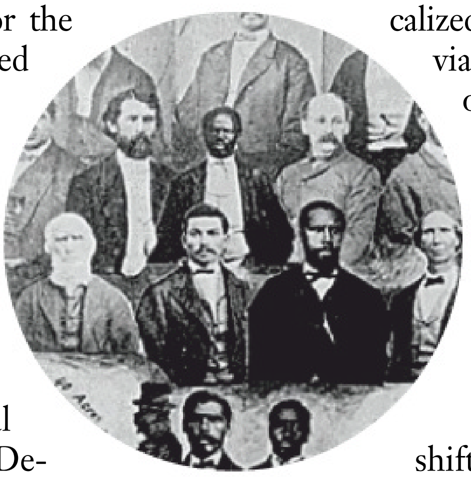
In 1854 the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened most of the old Louisiana Purchase to slavery, from which it had been prohibited for more than 30 years by the Missouri Compromise. The law proved to be the catalyst for the creation of the Republican Party, which was dedicated to halting slavery’s westward expansion, and it led directly to Bleeding Kansas, the battle over whether the territory would become a slave or free state.

Keith has a talent for storytelling, and she captures the drama of how the Massachusetts educator Eli Thayer and a group of Eastern Radicals organized the Emigrant Aid Company to assist antislavery settlers with the cost of travel to the Kansas territory and to provide them with supplies—including rifles. Those were certainly needed, since the territory was racked by violence. In 1856 proslavery forces there sacked the antislavery town of Lawrence, whereupon the abolitionist John Brown murdered several proslavery settlers. Two years later, he led a raid into neighboring Missouri that rescued a group of slaves, transporting them to freedom in Canada. Violence in Kansas fed into armed conflict elsewhere. In 1859, Brown and 21 followers temporarily seized the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to spark a slave revolution.

Keith claims that the Radical Republicans “bore responsibility for Harpers Ferry” because of their “incendiary language” against slavery and the fact that a number of New Englanders—including Emerson, Parker, and Bronson Alcott (the father of Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*)—participated in Brown’s planning or funding. “Our best people listen to his words,” Alcott wrote when Brown lectured in Massachusetts. These men, however, were hardly among the leading Radical Republicans, most of whom condemned Brown’s raid. So did Lincoln in his Cooper Union address of early 1860, although Keith unconvincingly suggests that Lincoln considered Brown and the Radicals “brothers under the skin” since they all hated slavery.

Keith’s conclusion that Brown was the “idol of Republican Radicals” also seems untenable, given the widespread Republican condemnation of his private war against the slaveholding South. But she is correct that by 1860, many Republicans, Radical or not, had embraced the legitimacy of violence. In this way, the Civil War “had already begun,” she writes. The experience of the 1850s “quickened” the Radicals’ “sensitivity to mass suffering…and heroic sacrifice,” leading them to conclude that when full-scale war did break out, it must be “a fight unto the death.”

The second half of *When It Was Grand* deals with Radicalism during the Civil War. As the stakes become higher—the fate of slavery, the rights of emancipated African Americans, the future of the postwar South—the cast of characters expands enormously. Black Americans for the first time become major actors in the narrative. We encounter figures little known even among historians, such as John Jones, a black activist in Chicago who in January 1865 spearheaded the movement that led Illinois to repeal the state’s notoriously discriminatory Black Laws. African American soldiers also become an important part of the story. Their battle for the same pay as whites produced the first national legislation mandating equal treatment regardless of race.



Keith emphasizes how the actions of Radical military officers helped propel the Lincoln administration down the road to Emancipation and at least a partial recognition of black rights. Determined to retain control of the policy regarding slavery, Lincoln overturned John C. Frémont’s 1861 order freeing the slaves in Missouri and a similar one the following year by Gen. David Hunter in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. But their actions helped push the fate of slavery to the center of political discussion, and at ground level, these abolitionist generals also forwarded the war’s revolutionary dynamic. “Much of the truly radical policy of the Civil War years,” Keith writes, “took place in military settings.” In Louisiana, Gen. John W. Phelps organized units of black soldiers without authorization from higher-ups and flatly refused to carry out an order to put runaway slaves to work reinforcing levees on the Mississippi River. The “crimes of their masters,” he declared, were responsible for wartime damage to the levee system, and therefore slave owners—not slaves—should take on the burden of repairs.

Encountering female refugees from enslavement in Union-occupied North Carolina, their backs scarred from whippings, Gen. Edward A. Wild invited the women to apply the lash to their former owners. The “ladies” eagerly did so, another officer reported, “not forgetting to remind the gentleman of days gone by.” Wild allowed Abraham Galloway, who escaped from slavery in 1857, to return to North Carolina, where he served as a spy for the Union Army and delivered speeches advocating political equality for former slaves—a demand he took directly to Lincoln when he led a black delegation that visited the White House in 1864.

Although Keith does not mention it, Galloway went on to serve in the North Carolina Senate during Reconstruction. There he demonstrated how the abolition of slavery inspired claims for new rights, introducing bills to protect women against violence by their husbands, to establish 10 hours as a legal day’s work, and to allow black people accused of crimes to be tried before all-black juries. She notes that many of the black leaders of Reconstruction shared the wartime experience of “engagement” with the “Radicalized United States government” via military service, political organizing, and teaching in schools established for freed people. She makes the telling point that demands for black voting rights “tended to trickle up toward the party leadership from activists in the field.”

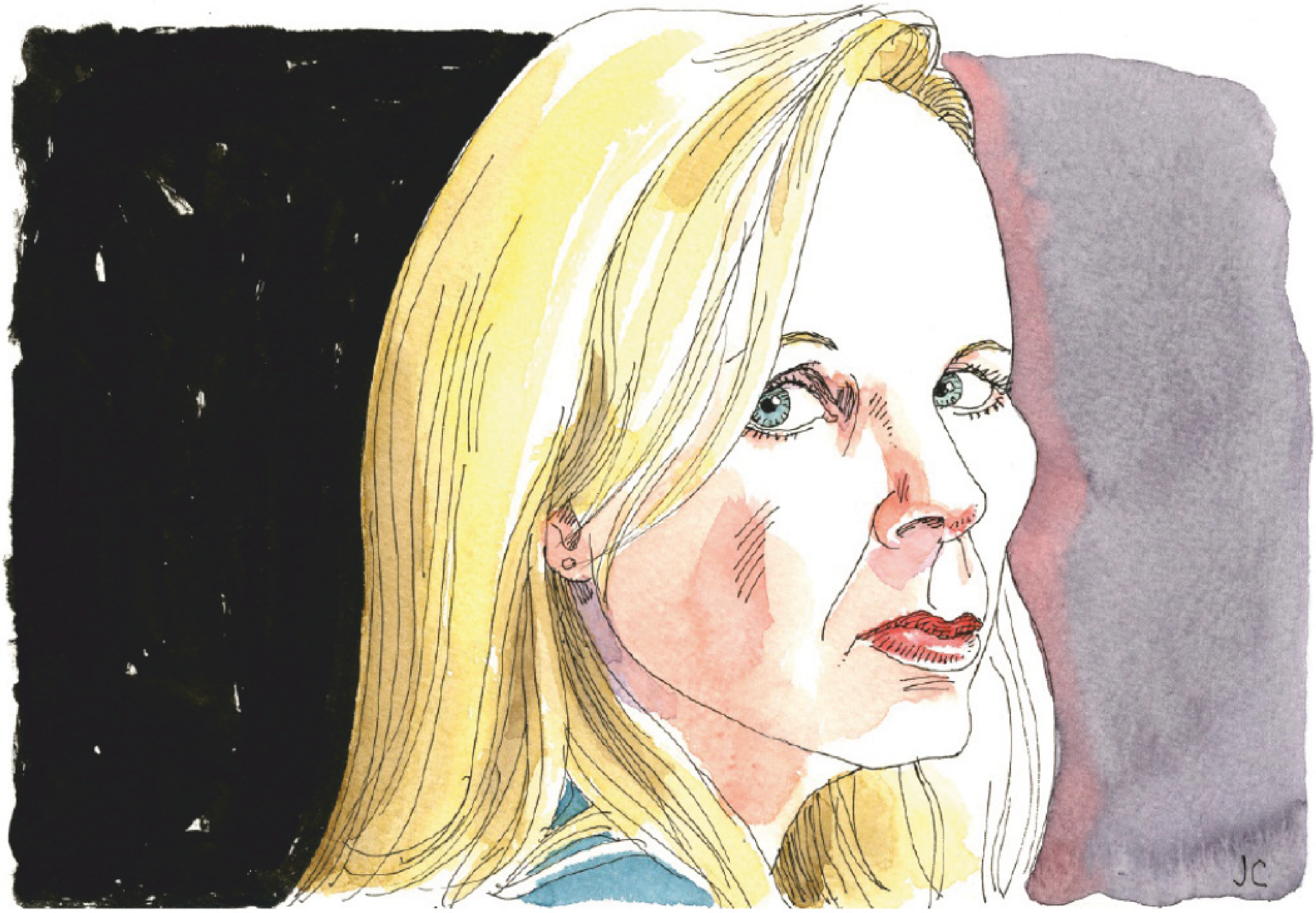
Keith deserves praise for shifting the center of gravity of wartime Radicalism away from Washington to military encampments and upstart black gatherings in the Union-occupied South. But in so doing, *When It Was Grand* seriously neglects some of the political dimensions of Radical Republicanism. In a recent article in *Catalyst*, a new left-oriented scholarly journal, the Princeton historian Matthew Karp convincingly portrays the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s and the destruction of slavery during the war as revolutionary outcomes achieved on “the field of democratic mass politics.”

The Radicals were central actors on this terrain. Before the war, they played a large role in the creation of an antislavery majority in the North. It was a development that made possible the election of Lincoln, a moderate Republican who worked closely with Radicals because he understood that they formed a crucial element of what would today be called the party’s base. The Radicals also pushed key pieces of wartime legislation through Congress, among them a measure early in the conflict barring the army from returning fugitive slaves, as well as the first and second Confiscation Acts—key steps on the road to Emancipation.

When It Was Grand stops when the war ends, at the very moment the Radicals begin to achieve their greatest influence and farthest-reaching successes. During Reconstruction, they spearheaded the rewriting of the Constitution to abolish slavery, enfranchise black men, and guarantee birthright citizenship and equal protection under the law regardless of race, bringing into being (if only temporarily) genuine interracial democracy in the United States. Despite the book’s many insights into the Radicals’ actions leading up to and during the war, one wishes Keith had followed their story into the Reconstruction years, linking the struggles for freedom on the plains of Kansas and battlefields of the Civil War with the postwar era’s congressional and presidential initiatives and constitutional changes.

While aware of the Radicals’ accomplishments, Keith ends on a less than celebratory note. In an echo of an earlier era of historiography, she writes that, in her view, “their aims were not pure” and they too often succumbed to the “love of power.” Trying to explain how the Republican Party eventually abandoned its commitment to equality, she claims that only abolitionists like John Brown and Gerrit Smith developed truly “collegial relations” with black activists—a judgment quite unfair to the many Radicals who worked closely with black colleagues in the struggle for equality.

These days, the Republican Party is far from grand. And the nation, Keith writes, has yet to “redeem the promise” of Radical Republicanism. For those engaged in that ongoing struggle, the Radicals offer compelling lessons on how to operate simultaneously inside and outside a political system, how to function as a wing of a party without being beholden to it, and how to achieve success as an ideological vanguard, putting forward a coherent plan for radical change and compromising when necessary, though without ever losing sight of one’s principles and long-term goals. ■



SOMETHING LIKE GRACE

Mary Gaitskill's art of loneliness

by MAGGIE DOHERTY

We're living in lonely times. Under orders to isolate at home, we're separated from our friends, family, coworkers, communities. We find ourselves missing our loved ones and missing, too, the many strangers with whom we used to share the city streets. Some people wonder if and when they'll touch another person. Others go feral, knowing that there's no point in primping when they're not going to be seen. Most of the time, these conditions feel unprecedented, unlivable.

Mary Gaitskill did not write her fiction for this moment, but as the country's leading artist of prepandemic isolation—and of the sudden, miraculous collapse into intimacy that it can spawn—she is perhaps, more than any of her contemporaries, the writer of our times. A skillful composer of short stories and several novels, Gaitskill found herself breaking into public life with her collection *Bad Behavior*, a book acutely focused on loneliness and the destructive things many of us do to overcome it. Populated by teenage runaways, disillusioned sex workers, bored businessmen, exploited models turned temp workers, her fiction describes cities after work and late at night, in which her characters search for connection and only rarely find it. Sometimes they find moments of grace and kindness; most of the time they hurt each other gratuitously and indiscriminately. In one early story, "A Romantic Weekend," two lovers with high hopes for an adulterous weekend witness their "seductive puffball cloud deflated with a flaccid hiss, leaving two drunken, bad-tempered, incompetent, malodorous people blinking and uncomfortable on its remains." The scene is familiar rather than anomalous; discomfort is Gaitskill's default setting.

Reading about her wary, lonely characters, one gets the sense the author knows whereof she writes. Her ex-husband, the writer Peter Trachtenberg, once wrote of Gaitskill, "I think I have never met anyone more lonely." One imagines her response: Sure, but I'm in good company. In her fiction, loneliness is a universal experience, the thing that unites people across class divisions and divergent personal histories. And yet it's also a great tragedy. When you feel alone, desperation drives your actions. A person might provoke or lash out or lie, all in the hope, perhaps even the

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ILLUSTRATION BY **JOE CIARDIELLO**

unconscious desire, that she will be seen or even seen through—that is, recognized as a damaged but tractable soul beneath a well-wrought surface.

This is how Gaitskill depicts Quin, one of the two narrators of her most recent work of fiction, *This Is Pleasure*, who is caught up in a publishing industry scandal, the kind now familiar from the Me Too movement. First we hear from Margot, a book editor well into a successful career, who recalls how her friend and fellow editor boasted about flirting with a stranger. Then we hear from Quin—the culprit—who has slunk back into his office in the night to retrieve a resilient orchid. He has been forced out of his job because he was sued for sexual harassment by a female former employee. Since her suit went public, we learn, other women have come forward with similar complaints. The story switches between the perspectives of Quin and Margot, friends for decades, as they try to reckon with what he has done wrong and how the industry has changed since the two of them started working in it.

The story is typical of Gaitskill in that it explores a familiar, even clichéd situation, only to subvert our expectations. The story is not one of justice served, nor is it one of justice miscarried. Instead, it is a story about how loneliness can deform a person, even one who seems to have so much going for him. The story doesn't excuse Quin's behavior, but in recognizing his flaws, it doesn't outright condemn it, either. Instead, it asks us to see Quin for who he is—eager, erring, lonely, a creep and a bad guy who probably deserves to lose his job but not his humanity—and it also asks us to try to recognize what we might share with him, what might cause us to behave badly. If this story of sexual misconduct refuses easy resolutions, it also offers something more sustaining: a recognition of the loneliness plaguing each of us and a suggestion for how the damaged among us might possibly be redeemed.

Loneliness—and the desire to escape it—is a current that has run through most of Gaitskill's life. Born in 1954 in Kentucky and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, she ran away from home during high school. "It was a whole huge mess," she later told an interviewer. She wandered from Detroit to Toronto to California, working a series of odd jobs, including street vendor, clerk, and stripper. She ended up stripping for only a short time, but critics and interviewers have focused on it, to Gaitskill's frustration. Finding herself once again being asked about that interlude in a 1999 interview with the writer Charles Bock, she responded, "Like most jobs I've had, I saw a lot of different things go on, it didn't bring me to any one or two conclusions." When he asked about how she chose the "sexual battlefield" as her subject matter, she let out what's described as an "audible sigh."

This Is Pleasure
A Story
By Mary Gaitskill
Pantheon. 96 pp. $18

She eventually expounded on some of her frustrations with those critics in the story "The Agonized Face," from her 2009 collection *Don't Cry*. In it, an unnamed "feminist author" appears at a literary festival and refuses to read from her work. Rather, she speaks about how she's been characterized by the local media and festival organizers in brochures advertising her participation and her history of sex work. "They had ignored the content of her work completely, focusing instead on the most sensational aspects of her life—the prostitution, the drug use, the stay in a mental hospital, the attempt on her father's life—in a way that was both salacious and puritanical." The writer reminds the audience that "when we isolate qualities that seem exciting, but maybe a little scary… we not only deny that person her humanity but we impoverish and cheat ourselves of life's complexity and tenderness!" Here we see the worldview that suffuses so much of Gaitskill's writing. There's an allergy to reflexive judgment, a moral dedication to capturing human intricacy.

This impulse was there from the beginning. In *Bad Behavior*, the 1988 short story collection that earned her epithets like the "queen of kink," Gaitskill frequently focuses on moments and characters in which opposite feelings and qualities intertwine. In one story, for example, we meet a man trying to dominate his female partner; he feels "an impulse to embrace her" but then "a stronger impulse to beat her." In another, a woman finds herself "horrified and fascinated" by "the desolation and cruelty of the city" at four in the morning. In a third, a woman working a menial job suspects that a wealthy friend views her with "a mixture of secret repugnance and respect." Relationships are also built on competing impulses. In one story, a sadist is both cruel and helpful in attempting to fulfill a woman's genuine desires. A boss, a harasser, victimizes his employee and at the same time spurs an important awakening in her. These encounters are not enjoyable exactly, but neither are they entirely damaging. They are simply things that happen.

Often, conflicting feelings arise in the face of weakness. As Deana, the sage girlfriend of the brittle Connie, puts it in the story "Other Factors," "It's kind of strange to be confronted so aggressively with somebody else's frailty. Some people will want to protect you, as I did, but some people will want to hurt you. Others will be merely afraid of you, for the obvious reason that it reminds them of their own frailty." Weakness in Gaitskill's work is both an enticement and a threat. People seek to exploit it in others, hoping that by doing so, they'll expunge it in themselves. But rarely does this impulse get her characters what they crave: recognition, connection, love.

Gaitskill wrote the stories that make up *Bad Behavior* over five years in the 1980s, after her graduation from the University of Michigan, where she studied journalism and writing, and her move to New York City. In her last year at Michigan, she won the Avery Hopwood Award for writing. It was usually a predictor of literary success, but Gaitskill found it more a harbinger of frustrated promise. Unable to sell any of her stories to magazines, she worked various clerical jobs, including one at the Strand Bookstore. These day jobs gave her material; she offered sharp accounts of the anomie and ennui that can come from doing office work. They also gave her models for some of her characters, many of whom work in offices.

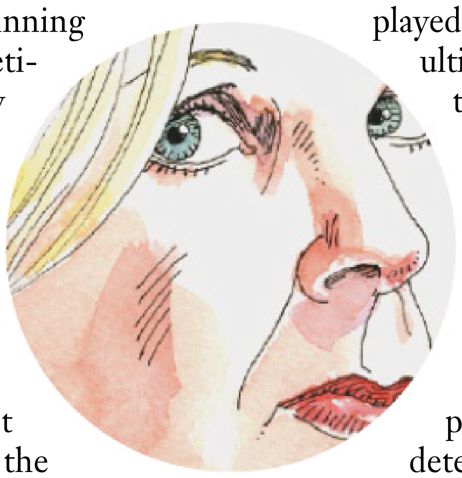
Gaitskill's best-known piece of fiction, "Secretary," is a story about office work. A newly trained typist and the only first-person narrator in *Bad Behavior*, Debby finds a job doing "very dull work" for an unusually inquisitive lawyer. She is a detached, closed-off person—"like a wall," the lawyer observes—and he wants to draw her out, to get her to "loosen up." He eventually gets what he wants: After Debby makes a series of typing errors, the lawyer spanks her in his office. "The word 'humiliation' came into my mind with such force that it effectively blocked out all other words," she recalls. "Further, I felt that the concept it stood for had actually been a major force in my life for quite a while." Aroused and ashamed at the same time, she masturbates to the memory that evening.

There are two more encounters between Debby and the lawyer, escalating in intensity and intimacy, and she begins to have recurring dreams. In one, they're standing in a field of flowers, and the lawyer tells her, “I understand you now, Debby.” After he ejaculates on her during another spanking session, Debby quits her job but says nothing to members of her family, although they can tell “something hideous” has happened. The lawyer eventually sends her a note of apology and $200, along with a request that she keep their encounters secret. Debby does, even when a reporter calls seeking information about her former boss. Feeling as if she's watching herself from outside her body, she says of the sensation, “It wasn't such a bad feeling at all.” The story ends on this moment of dissociation, a common response for people too traumatized to stay in their own skin.

“Secretary” was eventually made into a 2002 film starring James Spader and Maggie Gyllenhaal. In the essay “Victims and Losers,” Gaitskill calls the film “the *Pretty Woman* version” of her story, smoothed out to present its heroine as empowered. Gaitskill understands this emphasis on empowerment as a sign of Americans' fear of being seen as victims—of being humiliated or powerless or lonely. But for Gaitskill, the weakness her protagonist feels is something worth preserving; it is, above all else, a mark of her humanity. “To be human,” Gaitskill writes, “is finally to be a loser, for we are all fated to lose our carefully constructed sense of self, our physical strength, our health, our precious dignity, and finally our lives.”

Recognizing fragility can also lead to different and more meaningful victories—another theme that runs through her short stories and novels. In 1997's “The Blanket,” one of the sweetest stories Gaitskill has written, a 36-year-old woman and a 24-year-old man confess their love and commit to their relationship, but they can do so only after they have both admitted to the depth of their fear: the woman by telling the man that a particular bit of sexual role-playing upset her, the man by telling the woman how scared he is of losing her. In her first novel, *Two Girls Fat and Thin* (1991), two lonely women, both molested as children, find a tenuous connection, but only after one of them, a journalist, has published an unflattering account of the other. The book's final scene finds the two women sleeping in bed together, a platonic echo of the concluding scene in “The Blanket.”

The Mare (2015), Gaitskill's third novel, doesn't give us the same kind of happy ending. The book is a rewriting of the 1935 novel *National Velvet* (later a film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Mickey Rooney) told from the perspective of several narrators, the point of view changing with every chapter. As in the original novel, *The Mare* describes how a girl named Velvet (in Gaitskill's version, an 11-year-old Dominican American from the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn) tames an unruly horse and becomes a skilled rider. It ends with Velvet, now 13, winning her first equestrian competition and then immediately swearing off horseback riding forever at the behest of her abusive mother. Though the novel presents love as a dangerous force, it also acknowledges that it can provide people with moments of sweet communion—from Ginger, the childless woman (and avatar for Gaitskill) who fosters Velvet, singing to her while brushing her hair, to Velvet, feeling a connection to her horse “where my legs touched her sides…and we were in it together,” to Velvet's mother and brother, who join Ginger in cheering the girl to victory in her first and only equestrian competition. It's hard to characterize these moments; words like “happy” and “joyful” don't really do them justice, as they suggest the absence of pain or foreknowledge or doubt. Instead, these scenes are fleeting moments of connection and reprieve, and the characters can sense their end. Beyond impermanence, they are marked by ecstasy and quite often by forgiveness. They represent something like grace.



While Gaitskill's fiction is all about ambiguity, her nonfiction tends to be clear to the point of bluntness. In 1994 she wrote an essay for *Harper's Magazine*, “On Not Being a Victim,” that was an intervention in the debate then raging over date rape. On one side, there was a growing number of feminists who wanted to establish clear rules for sexual engagement—rules that men would know and obey—so women would not have to experience unwanted sexual advances. On the other side, there were figures like Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe, who insisted that women who made themselves vulnerable to violation were either stupid or naive (Paglia) or misrepresenting their experiences out of shame or regret (Roiphe).

Frustrated by the extremes she found on both sides, Gaitskill tried to plot a third course by looking with a fairly unsparing eye at difficult sexual encounters in her life, including two rapes. If she did not vilify the men involved, neither did she blame herself for being “stupid.” Gaitskill instead focused on the need for both men and women to better understand their desires and actions. Insisting that she did have some control over how at least some of these situations played out, she also recognized that ultimately she did not have *all* of the control. To create a world of sexual equality would require more than just rules; it would also require greater introspection on the part of men and women.

She presented herself as a case study. As a younger person, Gaitskill had trouble determining and then conveying what she wanted (and what she didn't want), and she sometimes suffered because of this. She suggested that other men and women ran into similar difficulties. She was not responsible for other people's actions, but her upsetting sexual encounters prompted her to reexamine her own motivations and desires. Gaitskill calls this “personal responsibility”—not the kind that Paglia and Roiphe wrote about but a self-awareness that helps a person protect herself and others.

Because of the phrase “personal responsibility,” “On Not Being a Victim” could easily be read as a provocation in today's context, with Gaitskill joining ranks with the anti-feminists. But she was not agreeing with Paglia and Roiphe; she was trying to show the fallacies in their thinking. To insist, as Paglia did, that just by going to a frat party, you take on the risk that you might be sexually assaulted was essentially to absolve the assailants of their transgressions. Gaitskill, on the other hand, was insisting on an inward reckoning, a questioning of one's impulses and reactions. “Dealing with my feelings and what had caused them, rather than expecting the outside world to assuage them,” was, for her, a key source of protection: The best means of self-defense required self-knowledge. Through it, she could feel “more confident” and recover her “ability to determine what happens to me.”

For her, both the feminists and the anti-feminists of the 1990s focused too narrowly on codifying sexual "rules" without paying attention to personal responsibility and self-awareness. "Roiphe and Paglia are not exactly invoking rules," Gaitskill wrote, "but their comments seem to derive from a belief that everyone except idiots interprets information and experience in the same way. In that sense, they are not so different in attitude from those ladies dedicated to establishing feminist-based rules and regulations for sex." The problem with these rules was not only how they were defined but also their inefficacy. Rules usually don't work if people don't buy into them. Gaitskill suggested that rules were quite often disempowering: If you're told to follow a rule that doesn't resonate with you ("Don't sleep with someone on the first date") or doesn't seem to fit a particular situation ("Never objectify a woman"), then you can't develop the kind of personal responsibility that enables you to better take charge of your life.

There might be a lot to argue with in Gaitskill's essay, and certainly the argument she makes is out of step with our moment. But it would be a mistake to characterize her as a cynic or nihilist or someone who takes cruelty and pain for granted. Instead, Gaitskill wants us to better understand what motivates behavior—bad and good—and why people hurt each other in spite of rules and regulations. If she's skeptical about the efficacy of rules, she's remarkably optimistic about people's capacity for self-reflection. The path she proposes in the essay is a more challenging one, but, she insists, it also has more potential to make lasting change.

This ethic of self-awareness and personal responsibility is also at the center of *This Is Pleasure*. In Margot's eyes, Quin is a mixed bag. An eccentric with a foppish haircut and a quick wit, he is a champion of women writers and yet a boss who evaluates his assistants based on the shape of their butts. He's a supportive friend—the only one to have Margot's back during a moment of crisis—and a compulsive flirt, at one point even attempting to reach up her skirt. He can be perceptive; he notes that Caitlin, his assistant, is "intelligent, more than she realized, and I wanted her to learn how to use that intelligence more actively." But he can also be astoundingly stupid. When Caitlin tells him that spanking is her kink, he sends her a clip from an old western in which John Wayne spanks an actress. Caitlin eventually sues Quin, citing the video as an offense.

This Is Pleasure was first published online by *The New Yorker* in July 2019. It calls to mind another piece of Me Too era fiction in the same magazine, Kristen Roupenian's "Cat Person," which went viral in December 2017. Roupenian's story was full of irony and ambiguity and all the stuff that makes fiction fiction. But many women, fed up with predatory men and fired up for change, nonetheless read it as moral instruction and pressed it into the cause. Gaitskill's story, like much of her fiction, resists such instrumentalization. Many who shared it on Twitter were strikingly coy concerning what they thought about it besides that it was "worth thinking about." Writers from across the political spectrum praised the story without saying specifically what they admired about it. Even if they couldn't agree on how to interpret it, most people agreed that they should respond.

This Is Pleasure is confounding in part because it seems more interested in examining Quin's inner life than it does in judging his behavior. The story does not deny his culpability and acknowledges that the loss of his job fits his crimes. But through the character of Margot, Quin is seen as not so much evil or tragic but pitiful. Successfully soliciting the kind of attachments he does not want, he is his own worst enemy. If his behavior remains unsympathetic, his motivations—a desire to be seen and a desire to be loved—are all too human in Margot's eyes.

This comes across in an early encounter between them. At a dinner together, Quin, who interviewed Margot for a job a few years earlier, tells her that he admires her new assertiveness. "I'm sure he didn't say this right away," she recalls, "but in my memory he did: 'Your voice is so much stronger now! You are so much stronger now! You speak straight from the clit!' And—as if it were the most natural thing in the world—he reached between my legs." In response, Margot shoves her hand into his face, "palm out, like a traffic cop," and tells him "no" as firmly as she can. But it is also in this very moment that she sees his humanity. "Looking mildly astonished, Quin sat back and said, 'I like the strength and clarity of your 'no.'" After this exchange, they order food, eat, talk, and later say goodbye "so warmly that a young man walking past smiled."

It's a remarkable moment. Quin recognizes Margot's "no," but Margot recognizes something in Quin—his desire, even his need to be restrained—and how, by denying his overt request, she formed a truer connection with him. Later, she remembers his expression when she stopped him from reaching up her skirt as "somehow *grounded* and more genuine than his reaching hand had been." Their friendship is forged not despite but because of this brief moment of struggle, during which each reveals something to the other and recognizes something in turn.

As the story goes on, we learn that Margot cannot unsee this humanity even as Quin's accusers grow in number. She doesn't fault them for failing to see it themselves, and she understands why they felt hurt or exploited. Yet Margot remains his friend throughout, even as she grows even more dismayed by Quin's lack of capacity for self-reflection, his defensiveness, and his self-justifications. At one point, he sits down to draft a statement—"I realize that the way I've carried myself in the world has not always been agreeable to those around me"—and finds his mind wandering to a piece of performance art and the sympathetic note he received recently from the artist, whom he describes as a "sexy girl." Quin, Margot recognizes, can't sustain the kind of self-inquiry that he needs in order to become "responsible," and so he may continue to hurt people. But he's also clearly lonely and desiring of a human connection. Margot has felt both of these things, too, and finds she cannot turn away.

For Gaitskill, the solutions to loneliness and the cruelty it so often prompts are honesty, vulnerability, and recognition; this is the underlying moral vision that courses through her fiction. Gaitskill may be a secular writer, but there is something almost religious in the way she depicts human frailty. It's common—indeed, inevitable—and cannot be barred or banned or legislated away; it can only be viewed, unblinkingly. And sometimes, after enough thought and time, forgiven.

Gaitskill, while deeply moral, is not a moralist. Whereas others might only judge, she attends, as artists are meant to do. By offering us a portrait of ourselves, lonely and uncertain and vulnerable, she finds that miracles occur: rapprochement and forgiveness, sudden kinds of intimacy and, if not love, then recognition. The world will remain a cruel one, but cruelty doesn't always win. Her fiction asks us to pause, to look more carefully so that we do not miss these forms of miracles—those moments that, like us, are present in this world only briefly, glimpsed for an instant, and then gone. ■

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A TEACHERS' STRIKE IN LOS ANGELES, JANUARY 2019 (RINGO H.W. CHIU / AP PHOTO)

STRUCTURE TESTS

How should unions organize in today's world?

by E. TAMMY KIM

In 2018, I was back home in the Seattle area, trying to understand the new texture of the place. There had always been pockets of wealth concentrated around high-tech companies like Boeing and Microsoft. But now, both in atmosphere and dollars, Greater Seattle had begun to feel like an Amazon company town. I wanted to know how non-engineers were getting by and whether longtime residents, low-wage workers, and newly transplanted coders could find common ground.

I began to sit in on meetings of the Workplace Organizing Collective, a group convened by the local chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. The facilitators were current and former union organizers, but most of the people who attended knew little of the labor movement. They were baristas and retail clerks, food service workers and engineers. They went to commiserate and to brainstorm solutions to unequal pay, abusive managers, and schedules that spun their homelives into chaos. The tech workers also raised larger-scale grievances such as unethical outsourcing and violations of privacy.

At one of these meetings, a man named Ira Pollock gave a presentation. He was a recent transplant from New York, where he'd taught ballroom dance lessons and gotten involved in socialist politics. Now he was working at a UPS sorting facility in South Seattle, moving containers of boxes and driving a forklift. The plant had long been unionized under the Teamsters, but as he told the group and then me in a separate interview, "There was no shop steward. My coworkers were all part-time, and no calls were made to the union. They mostly didn't even know the local."

Pollock began organizing his coworkers, not for a new union but to give meaning to the one they had. He befriended the people on his shift and encouraged them to come up with a list of shared demands: relief from the smoke when fires raged across western Washington and more staffing to cover spikes in cargo. He and his colleagues started to act together in ways big and small—signing petitions, pacing themselves on the job, and taking regular breaks so as not to let themselves be overworked. "After that, management started staffing us," Pollock told me.

Their manual was *No Shortcuts*, a 2016 book by the union strategist Jane McAlevey. In it she argued that gradual "whole worker organizing" and strikes, as opposed to quick,

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telegenic "mobilizations," can transform not only individual plants and offices but the country as a whole. Pollock explained to the group in Seattle how he implemented this approach, creating maps of his workplace and community, identifying "organic leaders," and guiding his coworkers through increasingly demanding "structure tests" that built their confidence and collective power. The room seemed as awed by Pollock as he was by McAlevey.

In recent years, McAlevey, now a senior policy fellow at the UC Berkeley Labor Center (and the strikes correspondent for *The Nation*), has drawn an enthusiastic following among activists, especially those in the DSA. She wrote her first book, a 2012 memoir and love letter to organizing titled *Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell)*, after staff jobs at the AFL-CIO and the Service Employees International Union and, in a testament to her drive, while being treated for cancer. Then came *No Shortcuts*, an outgrowth of her dissertation in sociology at the City University of New York, where she studied with Frances Fox Piven. When the book went to press, McAlevey had no reason to believe that we would witness a resurgence in organizing and strikes. Yet in 2018 and 2019, hundreds of thousands of workers joined unions or walked off the job, provoked by decades of austerity, a blitz of union-hobbling court decisions, and Donald Trump's election. *No Shortcuts* became an organizing bible for many, rivaling such classic guides as *Labor Law for the Rank & Filer* and *A Troublemaker's Handbook*.

McAlevey's latest book, *A Collective Bargain*, arrives in a new moment of danger and rebellion. The author's signature arguments are all here, but in the form of a primer on labor and democracy and framed for a general audience. She wrote the book in a rush (just 45 days, she says in the acknowledgments), and the loosely structured content reflects this haste: a mix of organizing shop talk, myth busters, interviews, case studies, and commentary on everything from Silicon Valley and Chinese manufacturing to employment case law and gun violence. But that's mostly beside the point. McAlevey's influence is such that the book, like her first two, is certain to be passed from hand to hand—and what more could an author ask for?

A Collective Bargain

Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy
By Jane McAlevey
Ecco. 304 pp. $26.99

McAlevey started out as an environmental activist, first with the Earth Island Institute in California and then at the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. She advocated for Central Americans harmed by the US military and worked in communities of color facing disproportionate pollution. But after nearly a decade, she grew tired of the environmental movement's frequent default to publicizing issues instead of organizing people. After a stint in philanthropy, she was recruited by the AFL-CIO and trained at SEIU 1199 Northeast, a large health care union known for its communist roots and commitment to rank-and-file power. There she absorbed two basic principles of organizing: first, to see workers as human beings, embedded in families and neighborhoods, and second, to use these personal and cultural ties to build clout in strategic industries.

The model of whole worker organizing was in fact the preferred strategy of the Congress of Industrial Organizations from its founding in 1935 to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. The CIO opposed the American Federation of Labor's practice of sorting workers into separate craft-based guilds (for carpenters, pipe fitters, and so on), which sliced up the labor movement and excluded those with less bargaining power. Thus while the AFL spent its resources protecting highly skilled workers and trying to influence the emerging labor-law regime, CIO activists coordinated large-scale strikes and organized hundreds of thousands of manufacturing, mining, steel, and needle trade workers, including immigrants, African Americans, and women. These remarkable gains were slowed, however, during World War II, then quashed by the Taft-Hartley Act.

For McAlevey, the 12 golden years of the CIO before Taft-Hartley retain a near mystical power, and she has tried to replicate whole worker organizing wherever she goes. In Connecticut she led the AFL-CIO's Stamford Organizing Project, a citywide multiunion campaign that aimed not only to unionize nursing-home workers and janitors but also to protect affordable housing. In Las Vegas and Reno, she helped revive a moribund SEIU health care local and recruited thousands of new, strike-ready members from multiple hospitals. It's clear from *Raising Expectations* that McAlevey and her staff organized down to the bone—enough to know every worker's network of friends, hobbies, clergy, and family members.

If this is real organizing, then what isn't? In *No Shortcuts*, McAlevey distinguished whole worker organizing from two other modes of union activism—advocacy (lawsuits, legislation) and mobilization (public relations campaigns, protesters wielding picket signs)—and applied this three-part framework to a range of case studies, including the Chicago Teachers Union and its historic strike in 2012, a pork-factory union in rural North Carolina, and the nonunion immigrant worker center Make the Road New York. What we call organizing and imbue with street cred or back-patting self-acclaim, McAlevey argued, often constitutes little more than political performance. To win, she wrote, unions need to spend less time and money on advertising and litigation and much, much more on targeted workplace campaigns.

The Smithfield Foods saga proved her point especially well. For more than a decade, the United Food and Commercial Workers had tried to unionize the Tar Heel, North Carolina, pork plant using every mechanism of the National Labor Relations Act. But at each juncture, Smithfield flouted the law, going so far as to assault workers and deploy "their own police force dressed in riot gear" to suppress voting in a union election. The UFCW filed complaint after complaint, but the National Labor Relations Board failed to enforce the NLRA, and the case languished in the federal courts. This would have been the end, if not for a shift at union headquarters. In 2006 new leaders at the UFCW decided "to go all out to win at Smithfield, and to do it by radically changing their strategy." They recruited a shop floor organizing committee, charted "social networks among the workers," designed a series of "escalating 'in-plant' direct actions," including a May Day strike, and with the help of outside activists like the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, built local, state, and national consumer campaigns against the company—a potent mix of organizing and mobilization. Finally, in 2008, 5,000 Smithfield employees voted to join the UFCW.

The Tar Heel union did more than represent its members, McAlevey argued in *No Shortcuts*; it became a base of political support for health care access, immigrant rights, and fair wages "in a key national electoral swing state that still has the lowest unionization level in the United States." Workplace democracy, in other words, could produce a larger democracy for all.

The tie between a sturdy union and a sturdy republic goes from being a secondary theme in *No Shortcuts* to the central thesis of *A Collective Bargain*. McAlevey dedicates her new book "to all the brilliant people who went on strike in 2018 and 2019…raising expectations that life should and can be better." In the course of seven chapters—with titles like "Who Killed the Unions?," "Everything You Thought You Knew About Unions Is (Mostly) Wrong," and "Are Unions Still Relevant?"—she explains why CIO-style organizing is now essential to empower ordinary people and "change the direction of this country."

"The experience of a well-executed union campaign," McAlevey writes, "helps workers understand, on their own, that their employer's effect on their lives goes beyond assigning them to an overtime shift and preventing them from getting time with their family." Whole worker organizing reveals "that their employer is part of a bigger system that is contributing to the failure of their kids' schools, the rollback of anti-pollution and anti-gentrification laws, [and] the gross inequities of the tax system," which is, in part, why the right has tried so hard to destroy unions. It is also why McAlevey believes that the basic principles of workplace organizing can be applied to electoral politics, housing, and environmental justice.

As with McAlevey's first two books, *A Collective Bargain* is strongest in its dissections of specific labor campaigns. In a chapter on hospital workers and corporate influence in Philadelphia titled "How Do Workers Get a Union?," she vividly evokes an effort in which she played a direct role. The Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP) hired McAlevey as a consultant in 2016 to help workers at the Einstein Medical Center win union recognition and to negotiate the first citywide contract in several other facilities. Her method at Einstein was simple but slow and granular: to get a supermajority of workers to actively support the union.

To build this support, McAlevey and her staff mapped out the hospital and identified organic leaders in each department—those who enjoyed the respect of management and held sway with their peers. The Einstein workers had won an NLRB election some weeks earlier, but the vote was close enough to signal weakness. Management responded by filing baseless legal objections and using "an A-level union avoidance firm" to turn employees against PASNAP. Among those turned was a charismatic, widely respected nurse—and indeed, when she tilted "no," most of her department followed suit.

McAlevey and her team knew that without this nurse, the union would have little hope of negotiating a strong collective bargaining agreement. They approached her carefully, giving her a copy of the draft contract and appealing to her and her colleagues' pride—"the same individuality they thought was threatened by the union." They then persuaded the nurse to meet and walked her "through how negotiations worked in a good union such as PASNAP and how, in a democratic union, all workers were invited and encouraged to attend their own negotiations." Less than 24 hours later, the nurse returned with 34 signed union cards. An organizer I know summed up McAlevey's approach as follows: "You have to work the plan. If you work the plan, you will win."

Few unions have worked this plan as well as the United Teachers of Los Angeles, which represents 34,000 employees in the LA Unified School District. The UTLA went on strike in January 2019 and won an unusually ambitious, wide-ranging contract that included caps on classroom size, increased staffing by full-time librarians and counselors, pay raises, legal assistance for undocumented students and their families, green spaces, and limits on charter schools—a major political force in California. In the chapter "How to Rebuild a Union," McAlevey explains how the UTLA got to this point. She traces the victory to 2012, when one of her mentors, the Los Angeles organizer Anthony Thigpenn, partnered with rank-and-file teacher activists to pass a statewide "millionaire's tax" that restored billions of dollars to the public sector. The teachers involved went on to win control of the UTLA in 2014, electing a "Union Power slate" that, in the words of Alex Caputo-Pearl, now the UTLA's president, campaigned explicitly on the need for an "organizing union."

Through interviews with Caputo-Pearl and others, McAlevey charts how a newly emboldened UTLA led its members through a series of structure tests, escalating actions "done by hand, face-to-face, across nine hundred schools" over four years. In the process of getting workers to attend a rally, sign new membership cards, or agree to pay more dues to fund organizing, the UTLA trained all educators to speak up. Teachers defined their priorities beyond pay and benefits, to target school privatization and the Trump administration's abuse of migrants. Community concerns became union concerns and gave teachers the public backing they needed to win in 2019.

Writing about the UTLA, McAlevey makes the work of checklists and "one on ones" feel high stakes and urgent. And she adds a structural analysis, arguing that education and health care are crucial strategic sectors, priority "growth industries" that are not easily offshored. Because these workers "are hard to replace [and] have a kind of moral authority in mission-driven work," she says, they possess the "capacity to hold the line on corporate greed."

The downside of a book intended to inspire is that it omits the campaigns that failed, those in which whole worker organizing didn't succeed. Surely there are times when, no matter how well union organizers chart a community or identify organic leaders or treat workers as networked organisms, they lose anyway. Reading *A Collective Bargain*, I wondered what we might learn from such campaigns and whether some contexts, such as construction day labor and informal domestic work, might require an alternative to CIO-style organizing.

One way of considering these questions is through a comparison of McAlevey's whole worker approach with that of her old boss Andy Stern, who was the president of the SEIU. In the late 1990s he and a group of SEIU leaders developed a plan to unionize workers in fast-growing service sectors—and to do so quickly and in large numbers without deep organizing. They began with home care workers, the isolated, mostly female aides who serve housebound, low-income elders and people with disabilities covered by Medicaid. For decades, these home health aides and personal care workers were classified as independent contractors, despite being paid and supervised by state agencies. As a result, they had no right to the overtime pay, workers' compensation, or collective bargaining that other public sector employees enjoyed. Stern's idea was not to organize these care workers through a conventional campaign but instead to pass legislation, state by state, that would deem them public employees for purposes of negotiating a union contract.

In numerical terms, the strategy was brilliant. As collective bargaining bills were signed into law, hundreds of thousands of home care workers gained rights, and the SEIU joined with private home care contractors to force higher Medicaid reimbursement rates from state agencies. Workers saw material improvements, typically in the form of insurance benefits, paid time off, and a bump in their wages to just above the legal minimum. Yet most home health aides developed no meaningful relationship with the union, let alone one another. The SEIU neglected to match its visionary recruitment plan with the daunting but necessary work of door-to-door organizing.

For McAlevey, Stern and his protégés have long represented a neoliberal turn in union strategy, from real rank-and-file organizing to technocratic mobilization. And she seems to have foreseen the vulnerability of their method: Home care unions eventually became the target of the right-to-work lobby and a business-friendly Supreme Court. In the 2014 case *Harris v. Quinn*, the court found that aides compensated by Medicaid were only "partial" public employees and therefore could not be required to pay into the cost of union representation. The ruling threatened the viability of home care unions and, by extension, the earnings and working conditions of aides and the welfare of patients. In 2018 the court expanded the holding in *Harris* to apply to all public sector unions.

Many people in the labor movement share McAlevey's criticisms of Stern, who now shills for the gig economy, and of his SEIU acolyte David Rolf, who has recently made a name for himself arguing that unions and collective bargaining are obsolete. Yet the strategy they employed in home care had its merits: Using legislation to unionize aides (and later, publicly subsidized child care workers) wasn't intrinsically wrong; the problem was the lack of deep, complementary organizing. McAlevey is right that a whole worker approach is needed to create lasting strength, but in a given campaign, for a given set of workers, the precise alchemy and sequence of organizing, mobilization, and advocacy may vary.

This might be said of the Fight for $15 in fast food, a more recent legislation-heavy SEIU effort that McAlevey has criticized for privileging one-day walkouts and minimum-wage bills over organizing. It's true that the campaign has yet to produce a union, but given the rapid turnover and poverty endemic to workers in the fast food industry, it isn't clear how to organize them without first attempting to stabilize their lives. Raising the floor through legislation may be a critical first step toward finding a more durable collective form.

The case of low-wage immigrant workers further illustrates the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all model. Workers may bring their own ideas, inflected by culture and life experience, to the question of how to gain leverage in a particular industry or community. They may also have no choice but to experiment, especially in sectors with large numbers of undocumented immigrants or in workplace structures stubbornly resistant to traditional unionization. McAlevey does not identify restaurants, nail salons, day labor corners, or private homes as strategic sites for organizing, but the workers in these spaces and the immigrant worker centers supporting them have developed their own ways to win self-determination and power.

Immigrant workers also remind us of the importance of transnational ties and cross-border solidarity, which CIO-style organizing, born of a less economically complex, less globalized era, does not necessarily take into account. In *A Collective Bargain*, McAlevey describes globalization as a convenient fiction, a way for American corporations to justify moving businesses from the unionized North to the right-to-work South or out of the country altogether. The rhetoric of globalization has certainly been used to enable union busting and profiteering overseas, but this only means that our scope of organizing must grow to match the ambitions of capital.

Describing the drift of manufacturing across the US-Mexico border, McAlevey writes, "As I drove to Nogales, I could smell the toxic exhaust emanating from U.S.-owned factories just outside the reach of much stricter laws stateside.… I understood that the free in free trade meant the freedom to pollute the planet, pay extremely low wages, and be exempt from all duties and obligations to society. American workers didn't stand much of a chance competing against these conditions, and neither did the planet." The villain is obvious—opportunistic American bosses—but by highlighting the chasm between "stricter" US laws and a foreign landscape free of "duties and obligations," McAlevey both overestimates working conditions stateside and pays inadequate attention to labor conditions across the border.

Elsewhere in the book, discussing labor conditions in China, McAlevey notes that most Chinese unions are jointly run by corporations and the state. From this, she concludes there's no labor movement in the country and extends this conclusion to the entire continent. "Do you wonder why CEOs of Asian companies can say what they like about their workers? Because the workers in some Asian countries are so explicitly repressed: they aren't allowed to use an independent Internet search engine to read stories of workers forming unions in places where the government doesn't attack them," she writes. McAlevey should have spoken with people who know this terrain or should have at least given the topic a vigorous Google search, as there are countless workers, organizers, and lawyers struggling for fair wages and safe conditions across Asia, even in authoritarian countries. Consider the many strikes and organizing efforts outside the structure of formal unions tracked by China Labour Bulletin or the activities of the anti-militarist Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar, which, along with the AFL-CIO, is an affiliate of the International Trade Union Confederation.

These sections of *A Collective Bargain* suggest that, while CIO-style whole worker organizing has been critical to fostering radical, strike-ready unions, it can also nudge members to turn inward and protectively hoard their gains. This is a problem not only in light of our globalized economy, climate change, and the coronavirus pandemic but also in the United States if our goal is to build a sturdy welfare state. Something is missing in an approach that leads the United Auto Workers to strike for the closure of General Motors plants in Mexico or compels Unite Here to condemn Medicare for All. Whole worker organizing is necessary but insufficient; we must also enlarge the valence of our community.

On the one hand, it's unfair to expect one book and one author to do it all. On the other, *A Collective Bargain* travels down enough tangents that my expectations were, well, raised. How can we connect shop floor organizing to global justice? Is it possible to bolster employment-based rights and benefits and tear down capitalism at the same time? And what does a movement of American workers mean in the context of US hegemony and an increasingly interdependent world?

McAlevey concludes her book with a warning: "Nothing can rebuild a progressive, ground-up base like a strike-ready union.… The choice is clear: build good unions, undo Taft-Hartley, and enable robust collective bargaining and strikes.… Otherwise, democracy ends." Fixing our own democracy is hard enough, but what good is a fortified island in a thrashing sea? ■

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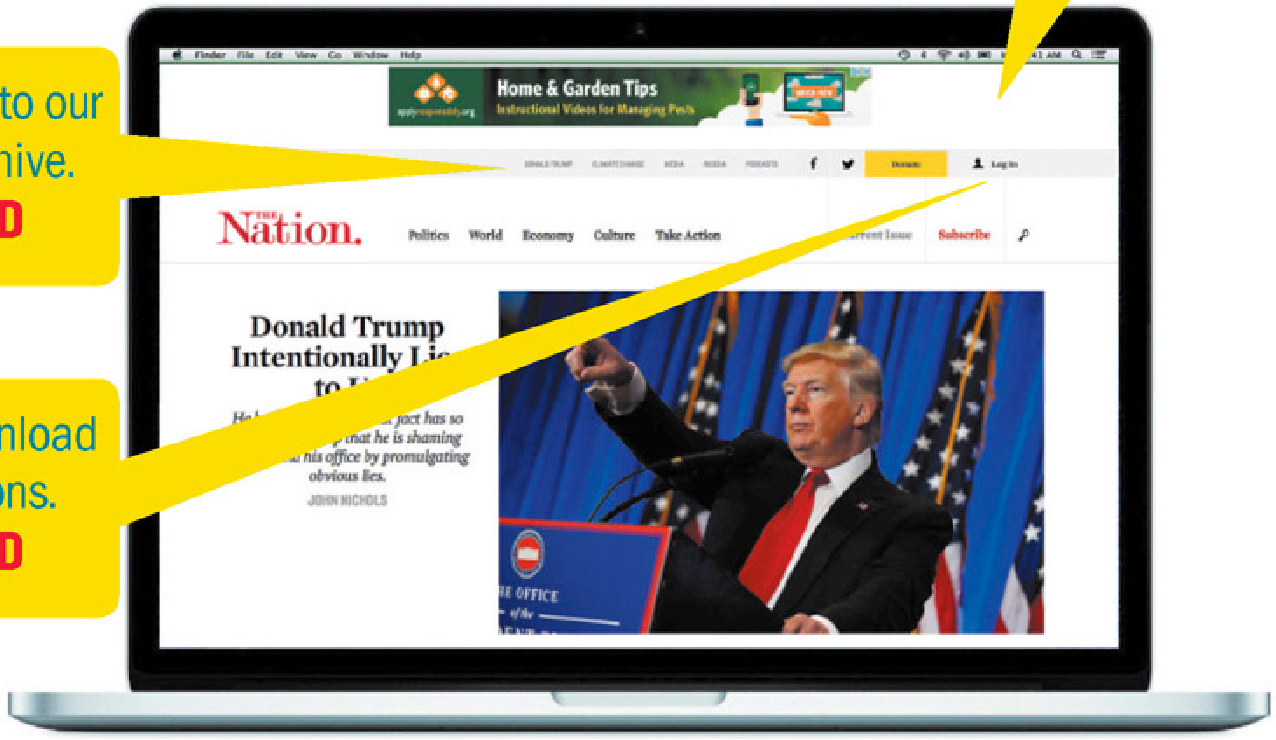
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NATO LEADERS AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE, DECEMBER 2019 (YUI MOL / GETTY)

ONE DAMN THING AFTER ANOTHER

The long roots of liberal democracy's crisis

by JAN-WERNER MÜLLER

The coronavirus pandemic reminds us viscerally of the original meaning of the word "crisis." According to the ancient Greeks, *krisis* designated a moment when a stark choice was revealed. In medicine, the patient is going to either live or die; in criminal law, the defendant will be found guilty or not guilty. And in politics? The past few years have seen a growing list of books produced by what skeptics might deride as the "crisis of democracy" industry. But are we dealing with a crisis in the sense of a truly make-or-break moment for the ideal of self-government? Or are we witnessing one of the regular ups and downs in political development—mild symptoms of a decay that could well be reversed?

Sheri Berman's *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe* and Adam Przeworski's *Crises of Democracy* both attempt to give us sober answers to this question. Berman's book is an impressive, amazingly wide-ranging account of European political development since the 17th century. Analyzing the trajectory of the continent from the English Civil War to the current malaise of the European Union, she seeks to identify the political, social, and cultural preconditions for democracy.

Przeworski, one of the world's most influential scholars of comparative politics, urges us to tone down the crisis talk, partly reflecting his minimalist understanding of what counts as democracy in the first place. Drawing on three historical examples—Weimar Germany, France's Fourth Republic, and Chile in the run-up to the 1973 coup—he argues that a real crisis of democracy looks very different from the election of a reality TV star as president or a country deciding to exit the EU, as worrisome as those developments might be. Yet he also observes two long-term trends that do make him concerned about the fate of even long-established democracies: increasing instability in party systems and, on a less abstract level, the fact that large majorities in countries across the West expect their children to be worse off than they are. These trends, Przeworski warns, are deeply disconcerting.

Read together, these two books remind us that democracies are unlikely to last without citizens having a minimum sense of the same shared fate—the very sense that

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once animated social democratic parties (of which Berman is a distinguished historian). At the same time, contrary to American centrists who lament divisions as such, the books make it clear that democracy does not require consensus but rather the capacity of a political system to process conflicts in a peaceful manner and the willingness of politicians to see their adversaries assume power. The problem is that the facade of such a system can be kept up long after the underlying reality has disappeared.

In *Democracy and Dictatorship*, Berman doesn't make any claims to historical originality. Her aim is to identify larger patterns on the basis of previous scholarship, and she does so through a series of stylized accounts (with helpful summaries at the end of most chapters) of the advances and, more commonly, setbacks of democracy in the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, and Spain, with occasional glances at Eastern Europe. Such a vast amount of material has to be fitted into a tight conceptual scheme. Berman's wager is that what she calls her "conceptual brush-clearing"—cutting back the thickets of misunderstanding that have engulfed terms like "democracy" and "liberalism"—will help us see patterns we missed before.

One potential misunderstanding involves our very notion of liberal democracy. Berman argues that this seemingly self-evident compound combines two concepts potentially in tension with each other. With its collective empowerment of citizens through elections, democracy is not the same as liberalism, which, she holds, is best understood as respect for the rule of law and minorities' rights as well as a commitment to treat all members of the polity as equals. Specifically, liberal democracy, she continues, is a rare and relatively recent achievement in Europe. One cannot get to it fast, and there certainly are no shortcuts; as Berman puts it, we should expect a marathon, not a sprint. And she goes on to show in the book that the marathon is impeded by an obstacle course.

The obstacles are often a legacy of the past. Berman helpfully reminds us that those trying to build democracy never start with a blank slate. Absolute monarchies and dictatorships and even relatively moderate regimes like Wilhelmine Germany rule by dividing societies.

Berman's presentation of 19th and 20th century German history backs up this point. After unifying the country and establishing a relatively wide franchise, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck waged an all-out *kulturkampf* against Catholics, about a third of the country's population. He accused them of being loyal to Rome rather than the Reich; he also went after the Social Democratic Party, the largest and electorally most successful workers' party at the time. The "Anti-Socialist Legislation" left a poisonous legacy for the Weimar Republic: Social Democrats were suspected of being traitors to the fatherland. Another lasting effect, not discussed by Berman but equally relevant to the trajectory of German democracy up to the present day, was that the SPD long felt the need to prove itself as *staatstragend*, a patriotic party that ultimately keeps the polity together. The party voted to enter World War I; in the conflagration's aftermath, it rescued German capitalism by turning against the country's more radical leftist forces. As recently as 2018 it saved Angela Merkel, as the party's leadership felt compelled to enter yet another grand coalition with the center-right for the sake of German democracy's stability.

Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe

From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day
By Sheri Berman
Oxford University Press. 560 pp. $25.99

Crises of Democracy

By Adam Przeworski
Cambridge University Press. 250 pp. $24.99

Berman is blunt about her view that having some significant degree of consensus and sense of national belonging is critical to make it to the finish line of the liberal democracy marathon. Italy, she insists, is a good example of why. After the country was largely unified in 1861, only about 2.5 percent of the population spoke anything recognizable as Italian. Sicilians had no idea what the word *Italia* meant (some thought it was the name of the king's wife); one figure who refused to use the country's name altogether was the pope, who lost large chunks of the Vatican's state to the new Italy and who proceeded to excommunicate the king, his ministers, and anyone else associated with what he referred to as the "Subalpine usurper." Italy apparently lacked Italians, and a democracy without a proper demos, Berman argues, is not a democracy at all. Indeed, for decades, Italy remained deeply divided, the state functioned only intermittently—and hardly at all in the south—and ruling elites secured power mainly through patronage.

For Berman, the clientelism that came to be associated with democracy in those years only further divided society, making it difficult to broaden the expanses of solidarity and to form strong political parties—the latter being, according to her, indispensable for modern liberal democracies to work. For her, this sense of fragmentation, strongly felt in 19th and early 20th century Italy and Germany, helped facilitate the rise of fascism in both countries. The Nazi Party, which at one point counted 10 percent of Germans as members, and the Italian National Fascist Party were what later came to be known as people's parties, which cut across various class divisions and created an image of national solidarity, albeit one strictly limited by racial boundaries. (Also, the reality of "social harmony" consisted in labor remaining subordinate to capital.)

According to Berman, the dangers of fascism point to the sense of solidarity and collective identity that liberal democracies need. Without them, polities can democratize too early and get stuck with mere "electoralism," or regular elections that depend on the de facto exclusion of significant parts of the population and result in no real turnover in power (a situation all too familiar to students of the American South). Another fateful scenario: Countries might have to go through the upheaval of nation building, state building, and democracy building all at the same time. This, Berman asserts, is essentially the story of Eastern Europe after World War I, where liberal democracy struggled to take hold properly, with the possible exception of Czechoslovakia (a fact that casts doubt on her thesis that a common national culture is essential to democratic politics, since Czechoslovakia was the most ethnically diverse country in the region).

As Berman shows by examining the history of Eastern Europe, the persistent power of landed elites often proved the largest obstacle to democratization. Tocqueville warned that "an aristocracy seldom yields without a protracted struggle, in the course of which implacable animosities are kindled between different classes of society." The only exception to this pattern—and an instance of "comparatively puzzling behavior," according to Berman—is Britain's gentry, which gradually extended the franchise in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Of course, it did so partly to avoid violent revolution. Faithful to Lampedusa's famous line about everything having to change in order for everything to remain the same, its members ended up preserving much of their wealth and power. It's a depressing thought that the persistence of inequality may have contributed to the fact that, during the interwar period, the UK was the only one of the states discussed in Berman's book that could count as a consolidated democracy.

In Berman's view, liberal democracy is ultimately possible only in strong states where there is a common sense of belonging and national culture. But her book also notes that behind such commonality lies long-forgotten and often brutal histories of violence. Because England went through a civil war in the 17th century, it had a much smoother political development in the 20th—or so the logic of Berman's account suggests. Thus the reader is left with the question, What other paths are there toward collective solidarity that do not move in the direction of a violent majoritarianism? According to Berman, this is where France fits in. In her French story, the violent consolidation of the nation-state under the ancien régime left a pernicious long-term legacy. But France also shows that not all forms of state creation and nation building have to be brutal or defined by histories of suppression. The Third Republic, the longest-lasting regime since the French Revolution, made society more cohesive through a common republican school education (and military service) that helped establish liberal democracy in the country.

Even here, however, an irony lurks in Berman's focus on the role a national culture plays in the formation of liberal democracy: It can read as if we get liberalism—which is to say, effective protection of minorities—only in circumstances in which there are no vulnerable minorities and hence no real need for liberalism to begin with.

In the last pages of *Democracy and Dictatorship*, Berman urges us to lower our political expectations and take leave of the naive post-1989 expectation that every nation would race toward liberal democracy and get there quickly enough. She writes that countries stumbling "along the way to democracy are the norm rather than the exception." That's not much of a consolation for the despairing Poles and Hungarians who saw their dreams of liberal democracy crushed in the past decade. Berman would tell them that democracy building requires two phases: a proper dismantling of the old regime and then consolidation of self-rule. It takes patience and time—to which they'd likely respond with John Maynard Keynes's observation that, in the long run, we are all dead.

Young Eastern Europeans might further remind us that until recently, some social scientists had a politically hopeful message for their increasingly prosperous countries. One of them is Adam Przeworski, a Polish-born political scientist teaching at New York University. He still maintains that "we have known for some time that democracies are impregnable in economically developed countries." He also suggests there is another empirical constant: The longer a country has been a democracy, the more likely it is to remain one. As he puts it, "The taste for selecting governments through elections is an acquired one, but it is addictive once acquired" (or as Berman might say, once you get jogging, you'll just keep going). Citing the United States as an example, he notes "the probability that the incumbent would not hold an election, or hold one making it impossible for the opposition to win, is 1 in 1.8 million country years." (Improbable is, of course, not the same as impossible; we'll find out more this year.)

Przeworski opens his short, dense, but rewarding book with an appeal to tone down what Saul Bellow once called "crisis chatter." According to Przeworski, surveys that show people longing for strong leadership do not demonstrate that democracy is giving way, nor do mass strikes or even riots (even if they were more frequent in countries where democracy eventually fell). Actual breakdown looks different, he insists, pointing to three paradigmatic cases: the collapse of the Weimar regime, which still casts the largest shadow over democracy studies; the ascension of Charles de Gaulle in the late 1950s in France; and the military coup in Chile in 1973. The lesson is that crises lead to collapse only when the political system fails to regulate rivalry and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner, and in nearly all liberal democracies, we do not seem to be at that point—at least not yet.

Even though Przeworski's historical arguments are persuasive, sometimes the past might be just the past. As he acknowledges, "history does not speak for itself," and we might simply be caught in webs of misleading but oddly comforting analogies. Until recently, the breakdown of democracy was almost always accompanied by violence. As he points out, "between 1788 and 2008 political power changed hands as a result of 544 elections and 577 coups." But what about those democracies that were not destroyed by force but instead were undermined stealthily or just slipped away somehow? And in the latter cases, how would we be able to tell?

Przeworski's previous work gives us a hint. At one point he offered one of the pithiest definitions of democracy: a political system in which parties can lose elections. This might sound not so much pithy as banal, but it contains an important insight. If there is no real turnover of power, it probably isn't a democracy, which Przeworski also summed up, in an equally epigrammatic manner, as "institutionalized uncertainty." Political outcomes have to be unpredictable (if you like complete predictability, North Korea is probably an attractive option); at the same time, this uncertainty needs to be institutionalized through constitutions and electoral laws that all of the contenders for power accept and that make what is unknown still nonetheless controllable.

Yet without any overt show of force, much of the uncertainty seems to have been taken out of politics in "autocratizing" (alas, an entirely appropriate neologism for our age) countries like Turkey and Hungary. The courts have been packed, the media brought to heel, and gerrymandering and all kinds of other political dark arts used to ensure that electoral outcomes aren't much in question. The more that can be done under the color of law, the less needs to be accomplished through force of arms. Just think of Russian President Vladimir Putin's latest brazen attempt—immediately approved by the Russian constitutional court—effectively to keep himself in power for life.

Is something similar possible in the democracies that Przeworski deems "impregnable"? Here, worries finally set in, and his tone changes. He identifies two current developments that are unprecedented and that he argues might signify that the supposed laws in democracy-promoting social science no longer hold.

The first is a level of pessimism never seen in surveys before. Sixty percent of Americans and 64 percent of Europeans think their children will be financially worse off than themselves. Przeworski observes with barely concealed alarm that "this collapse of the deeply ingrained belief in intergenerational progress is a phenomenon at a civilizational scale." The second factor is less obviously threatening to democracy. He diagnoses an increasing fragmentation and instability of party systems. One of the remarkable empirical findings of his book is that, despite the enormous upheavals over the course of the 20th century, the dominant parties in many Western European countries remained ideologically consistent from the 1920s to the late ’90s. It’s not quite evident why that should be such a problem in and of itself. Think of left-wing newcomers like Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece or, for that matter, the ideologically still somewhat indistinct Five Star Movement in Italy. They obviously made the formation of governments more difficult; Spain had caretaker governments for months on end. And in the eyes of admirers of the Westminster system, ever-larger coalitions also exact costs in terms of accountability: Unlike in a simple two-party system, voters have no real idea who’s responsible for what.

But consider what new parties have actually meant outside the abstract modeling of specialists in comparative politics. For decades, Spanish and Greek politics were dominated by two large and, to varying degrees, corrupt parties that, during the euro crisis, offered more or less the same cruel economic policies. Disillusioned youngsters—whose lives will forever be marred by this lost decade of austerity—returned to the voting booth once new, attractive options appeared on the ballot. True, neither Podemos nor Syriza was able to end austerity. But to read their rise as a sign of a “crisis of democratic representation,” as has been common, is to get things exactly the wrong way around. The crisis would have consisted in the old parties continuing to govern as a kind of cartel. As societies change and new conflicts appear, party systems should adapt and transform in sometimes surprising ways; they should indeed provide institutionalized uncertainty.

That still leaves us with the new wave of intergenerational despair. The danger is not necessarily that people will prefer authoritarianism over existing democracies, though the patently inadequate responses of many democracies to the coronavirus crisis might encourage that kind of thought. (But if it does, never fail to mention democratic Taiwan, which dealt with the pandemic much better than the mainland.) But that doesn’t mean the more plausible explanation of how despair could destroy democracy is necessarily any more reassuring. Many citizens seem aware that the Viktor Orbáns and Donald Trumps of the world are chipping away at democracy. Yet in highly polarized and increasingly unequal societies, they are willing to put up with the damage because of economic self-interest (whether illusory or real) or other short-term partisan advantages. As Yale political scientist Milan Svolik has shown, there is little evidence that people have had it with democracy as such—a major difference with attitudes in the 20th century, when plenty of people considered parliamentary democracy an obvious failure and embraced fascism as the way of the future. But today some citizens are willing to engage in a trade-off between what’s personally good for them—scrambling to provide a better future for their kids—and respect for institutionalized uncertainty.

Given that this problem is ultimately a matter of far-reaching changes in the economy and society, Przeworski can’t help but end up declaring himself “moderately pessimistic about the future.” What he’s afraid of is not spectacular coups but a stealthy, creeping authoritarianism that keeps diminishing institutionalized uncertainty. Many governments, from Orbán’s in Hungary to Narendra Modi’s in India, are following this path; the coronavirus crisis, if anything, makes them show their authoritarianism more openly.

Both *Democracy and Dictatorship* and *Crises of Democracy*, while not quite spelling out the point, remind us of the important link between liberal democracy and social democracy. Berman stresses at the end of her book that democracy in postwar Western Europe worked because the large political parties proved responsive to the citizens’ socioeconomic demands; Przeworski, in pointing to the perils of widespread pessimism about the economic future, effectively backs up that point. Both books also exhibit a healthy degree of skepticism when it comes to how much an overly abstract and quantitatively oriented political science, long driven by economics envy, can help us under the circumstances. Berman stresses the importance of historical contingency and what is sometimes called path dependency. History may be just one damn thing after another, but the sequence of these things matters in terms of some political possibilities opening up and others being foreclosed. Przeworski, no stranger to complicated statistical calculations, even goes on record with a remarkable admission. “The intuitions from memoirs and even novels,” he writes, “may be as illuminating as from systematic data: they tell us how individuals perceived and experienced the dramatic events in which they were protagonists and, in the end, it is their actions that determined the outcomes of crises.” Of course, this point about “action” is actually a hopeful message: It’s still at least somewhat up to us. ■

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THE CIRCLE

Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and the origins of American anthropology

by JENNIFER WILSON

In 1949 a Columbia anthropologist named Geoffrey Gorer published an essay in his study *The People of Great Russia*, in which he attempted to provide insight into why those living in the Soviet Union were not more resistant to Stalinist authoritarianism. It was not because they were tortured or threatened with the gulag, according to Gorer and the study's coauthor, the psychoanalyst John Rickman; it was because they had been swaddled for too long as babies. Gorer had studied child-rearing practices across Western and Eastern Europe and found that Russian peasants tended to swaddle their children for longer periods than other parents did, sometimes up to nine months. Therein lay the explanation, Gorer and Rickman insisted, for why the Soviets preferred the warm cloak of authoritarianism to the freedoms of Western liberalism. The theory, which came to be known as the swaddling hypothesis, was roundly and rightfully mocked. One critic called it "diaperology." Gorer's friend and fellow anthropologist Margaret Mead defended and even doubled down on his theory; she insisted that in swaddling them for so long, "Russians communicate to their infants a feeling that a strong authority is necessary."

The swaddling hypothesis and the ire it justly provoked dealt a considerable blow to the prestige of the national character studies program just as it was reaching its zenith at Columbia, raising questions about the methodologies being employed there and even the value of culture as a heuristic. It also highlights a problem with the work of these anthropologists, which is often framed as revolutionary and egalitarian for insisting that human differences are rooted in culture rather than race. That such a worldview would be any less dangerous is belied by the reality of how this research—culture cracking, as it was known—was employed. From World War II into the early years of the Cold War, anthropologists in the program were repeatedly tapped by the US government to create national profiles for countries deemed threats to US national security. The most famous of these was Ruth Benedict's wartime study of Japanese culture, later published as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), but the program produced countless reports for the government on China, Syria, Eastern European Jews, and other "cultures" that needed decoding before they could be exploited.

Thus, while it attracted the most atten-

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ILLUSTRATION BY **TIM ROBINSON**

tion, the diaperology controversy did not represent a break with the tenets of cultural anthropology so much as it exposed the problems that had always been lurking beneath the surface, obscured by the hallowed lineage of the discipline. Besides Gorer, Mead, and Benedict, Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston, Ella Cara Deloria, and Edward Sapir all considered themselves cultural anthropologists. At a time when the country's foremost social scientists, figures like the eugenicist Madison Grant, were insisting that different cultures fell along a continuum of evolution, cultural anthropologists asserted that such a continuum did not exist. Instead of evolving in a linear fashion from savagery to civilization, they argued, cultures were in a constant process of borrowing and interpolation. Boas called this process "cultural diffusion," and it would come to be the bedrock of cultural anthropology, inspiring an entire generation of anthropologists to travel the world searching for examples of it. Hurston went to Florida to collect African American folklore, Deloria to the American Southwest to codify Native American languages, and Mead to American Samoa to ask teenagers about their sex lives. And while their findings have been heralded as revolutionary—within the social sciences and for the general public—they also laid the groundwork for a new form of liberal racism centered on cultural rather than physiological difference.

Boas referred to himself and his students at Columbia as "our little group," and in a new book, *Gods of the Upper Air*, Georgetown professor Charles King puts their lives, habits, and missteps on full display. He paints their rise as a heroic struggle against xenophobia, racism, and theories of cultural supremacy. "This book," he tells us, "is about women and men who found themselves on the front lines of the greatest moral battle of our time: the struggle to prove that—despite differences of skin color, gender, ability or custom—humanity is one undivided thing," and he is certain that in this battle, they not only fought but won. "If it is now unremarkable for a gay couple to kiss goodbye on a train platform, for a college student to read the *Bhagavad Gita* in a Great Books class, for racism to be rejected as both morally bankrupt and self-evidently stupid…then we have the ideas championed by the Boas circle to thank for it." But reading King's highly researched book, one can come to a different conclusion. "Culture" often proved to be too slippery a term in the hands of these "gods of the upper air" (a phrase borrowed from Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*). As King traces their development, particularly Boas's, it becomes clear that their ideas about culture and cultural differences were not as distinct as they imagined from the notions of racial difference they sought to overturn.

Gods of the Upper Air
How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century
By Charles King
Doubleday. 448 pp. $30

Franz Boas was born in 1858 in the small Prussian town of Minden. He passed his childhood years reading *Robinson Crusoe* and tinkering away at anything he could get his hands on. He was rapaciously curious and tactile, and it was through academia and fieldwork that he would ultimately satisfy his thirst for adventure, both physical and intellectual. He started taking courses at Heidelberg, then transferred to the University of Bonn before he eventually matriculated at the University of Kiel. German universities were, at the time, awash in the ideas of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried von Herder. As Boas would do many years later, Herder challenged the idea that humankind was divided into distinct races, arguing instead that the distinctions between people were contingent and tied to culture and homeland. His ideas electrified Boas's thinking and continued to do so for the rest of his life.

In his writings and lectures, Herder insisted that the idea of separate races or peoples was a fiction; instead, there was one human race that had been transformed over time into many different cultures. Yet as his work would show, such a view was not incompatible with a white supremacist ideology. While King does not mention this, Herder wrote, for example, that "the Negro" should be met with empathy, not hatred, "since the conditions of his climate could not grant his nobler gifts," and Herder's view of cultural difference would pave the way for a romantic nationalism that rooted culture in a specific homeland or "soil"—concepts of national identity that later became prominent in Nazism. Nonetheless, for Boas, Herder's theorization of "culture" helped chart a way forward for his own work. If difference was not rooted in physicality but in culture, then culture needed to be studied with the same seriousness as other academic disciplines.

Boas did not immediately take up anthropology as his field of specialization. He first studied physics and wrote his dissertation on the way light is polarized in water. He took plates to the main harbor in the city of Kiel to see at which depths their reflections began to change in appearance. However, he soon became more interested in how different groups might perceive those changes in the first place. He wanted to understand "the point at which we make the decision that something is no longer blue, say, but aquamarine." After defending his dissertation in 1881—just as the first British textbook on a nascent subject, anthropology, was published by Edward Burnett Tyler—Boas joined a new generation of scholars excited about the promises of ethnology to explain human diversity. What exactly the field was, no one really knew, but that was part of its appeal for Boas. So, too, was the prospect that he could satisfy his "lust for travel," King writes, while "building, bit by bit…a master science of humankind."

Boas's first foray into the field was a trip to Baffin Island in the Arctic to study the Indigenous groups that lived there. From the outset, there was little doubt that he brought from Europe not only his notebooks but a certain cultural chauvinism as well, referring to the groups he studied as "*my* Eskimos" and writing that their dwellings were "not as dirty as I thought." But he did go there to learn—in particular about how the local population on Baffin Island was able to navigate a landscape that repeatedly stymied outsiders. The journey was also, Boas confessed, an effort to advance his career. "I would immediately be accepted among geographical circles," he explained to an uncle about the purpose of the trip, during which he planned to "map the ice floes, snowdrifts, and habits of seal pods."

The terrain and weather proved too treacherous for such research, so Boas spent more of his time speaking with the locals, writing down Inuit words, and learning more about these people upon whom the European whalers were totally dependent. He jotted down notes on igloo building and the mechanics of a dogsled. He became particularly close with an Inuit man named Signa; through their conversations, King tells us, Boas learned that "Signa was no timeless native simply struggling for survival on an unchanging shore. He had a past, with wanderings and movement, a family lineage, and remembered moments of hardship and joy." These are King's observations, and it's unclear how much of this made its way into Boas's published record of the journey, which drew from his trunks of sketches, notebooks on local languages, and maps (mostly drawn by Inuit people).

Upon returning from the Arctic, Boas turned his attention to the native population in British Columbia. He hoped that fieldwork in North America would position him better for employment in the United States, where anthropology was finding a home in new institutions like the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, and the Museum of Natural History in New York City. But on the Pacific Coast, he began to have doubts about American social science. While the Smithsonian organized cultures into stages of development, beginning with "savagery" and rising to "barbarism" before finally reaching "civilization," he found that many of the Indigenous peoples thought to exist at the same stage of human development were, in fact, quite disparate. "On the Northwest Coast," as King writes, "Boas had found both wide variety and striking similarities among indigenous communities, with nothing to suggest that Bella Coola and Salish, for example, were all at the same stage of development."

Boas's growing ambivalence toward American social science was on full display, literally, at the world's fair in Chicago in 1893. At the behest of Frederic Putnam, the curator of Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Boas agreed to create an exhibit that would showcase anthropology's potential as a new field of study. The exhibit was to focus on anthropometry, the science of measuring human anatomy and a frequent site for racist faux-scientific theories, where physical features like chin length were used to explain social behavior. Boas lined up the skeletons of Native Americans and "half-bloods" (presumably people with one black and one white parent) in accordance with Putnam's wishes, but as King notes, no conclusions could be drawn from this display. For instance, "an attempt to show the heights of Italians ended up finding no obvious pattern from northern Italy to the south." The exhibit was, at least from Putnam's point of view, a disappointment, because few people attended it, but it helped sharpen Boas's insistence that the science did not provide evidence to support white supremacy or proof that cultural differences manifested physically.

Soon after, Boas was hired by Columbia, where he would spend the rest of his career and train some of the most influential writers and thinkers of the 20th century. One of his first major research grants came from Congress. Vermont Senator William P. Dillingham had just put together a commission to study the effects of the recent wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Like Putnam, Dillingham wanted Boas to create a way to, in King's words, "distinguish advanced, healthy, and vigorous northern Europeans from the lesser subraces now stumbling over one another on the streets and alleyways of the Lower East Side." Boas never disputed the terms of the inquiry and went forward using anthropometric tools, measuring the heads of US-born children of immigrants to see if they looked more like their parents' or like those of other American children. Boas was not morally opposed to the idea that there were real physical differences among ethnic groups and that those differences had meaning beyond the body, but he also wasn't convinced that this could be backed up by scientific inquiry. At the end of his study, he concluded that the children of foreign-born "round-headed Jews" took on the characteristics of their new country and "became long-headed." The same was true of other immigrant groups, he wrote. "The long heads of Sicilians compressed into shorter heads. There was, in other words, no such thing—in purely physical terms—as a 'Jew,' a 'Pole,' or a 'Slovak.'" Consequently, the Dillingham Commission largely rejected his findings when drafting its conclusions.

Much like Herder, Boas wasn't interested in scrubbing culture of the kinds of differentiation and hierarchies that underpin the notion of race. He may have wanted new categories to place people into, but he never believed that people defied categorization. He regarded his work as primarily a matter of empirical analysis, not political or moral argument. But his early anthropological work and desire for factual evidence still put his research in direct contention with the fearmongering eugenicists and racists of his era.

While Boas is the protagonist of the first half of *Gods of the Upper Air*, King focuses on his disciples in the second half, in particular on Mead, Hurston, Benedict, and Deloria. He begins with Mead, who, like the others in this circle, proved to be as formidable as her mentor. Born to academic parents (her father taught business at Wharton, and her mother was a sociologist who researched Italian immigrants), she grew up in Pennsylvania and entered Barnard College in 1920 as a sophomore. While taking a course in anthropology with Boas and his assistant, Benedict, Mead fell in with a "group of freethinking, adventurous women, disheveled but intellectually fashionable, half of them Jewish, and all equally acquainted with Bolshevism and the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay," who were looking for a way to quietly rebel. At the time, Boas was in the midst of developing his theory of cultural diffusion, a counter to the dominant school of cultural evolution, and Mead found in it the perfect outlet. As King describes it, "Human practices and habits did not diverge from some single ancient norm; rather, from the earliest times, people living in different places had done things differently, sharing and modifying their habits as they came into contact with unfamiliar individuals and groups." It was a provocative idea, and Mead decided to pursue it in graduate school at Columbia. (She also wanted to pursue Benedict further.)

For her PhD dissertation, Mead decided to look for examples of cultural diffusion in Polynesia. After arriving there in 1925, she became interested in a topic closer to her personal circumstances: sexual norms and how to break free from them. Mead was carrying on three love affairs at the time. "She had left behind a husband in New York," King writes, "and a boyfriend in Chicago, and had spent the transcontinental train ride in the arms of [Benedict]." She would also become involved with another person on her sea voyage back. In Samoa, Mead began exploring the sexual practices of the people there, writing that they were freer to experiment with homosexuality and polyamory. "Romantic love," she wrote in her book *Coming of Age in Samoa*, "as it occurs in [American] civilization, inextricably bound up with ideas of monogamy, exclusiveness, jealousy and undeviating fidelity, does not occur in Samoa." She conceded that while there might be similar patterns in behavior between the two cultures (infidelity, as she well knew, occurred in the United States), how people felt about that behavior differed widely. As King writes, for Mead, "Americans…seemed to organize their intimate lives around an idealized sex experience…. Samoans saw things another way."

Coming of Age in Samoa soon became a landmark work of cultural anthropology and was a touchstone for sexual freedom in the United States in the 1960s. As King suggests, the popularity of her book points to some of the problems with its analysis. "Mead was trying something new," he writes, but what she ended up doing was to use it as "a mirror…to hold up to her own society." Her desire to create a world of sexual liberation in America had led her largely to invent one in Samoa. "*Coming of*

Age in Samoa was full of bravado and overstatement," King writes. "Mead had few compunctions about drawing grand conclusions from a small sample set, fifty girls in three small villages on one island in the South Pacific." It is of course tempting to excuse Mead, a young queer woman who was no doubt in search of validation and acceptance, for projecting her interests onto her research, but in the coming decades the Americanization of other cultures—the way in which other parts of the world became grist for American self-definition—would prove to be not just dangerous but deadly, especially as cultural anthropology soon became part of the war effort.

When the United States entered World War II, many American officials regarded Germany as an aberration, "a normal, civilized society that had been overtaken by a devilish ideology and a barbaric dictator," King writes. The Japanese, on the other hand, were seen as "subhuman and repulsive," an alien species that most Americans knew nothing about. The US government enlisted the help of Benedict, who had by then joined Columbia's anthropology department as a faculty member, to "crack" Japanese culture.

Tasked by the Office of War Information with writing a report on "Japanese behavior patterns" that might help the US military identify weaknesses it could exploit, Benedict employed what was called anthropology "at a distance," ethnographic work based on documents and cultural works such as novels and films. She also consulted at length with a Japanese American named Robert Hashima, who was born in the United States but was educated in Japan. He reportedly tutored Benedict "on everything from the Japanese tea ceremony to the captured diaries of Japanese soldiers, from hazing rituals in schools to popular movies. When her reports required a Japanese term or phrase, handwritten in *kanji* characters, it was Hashima who supplied them." The 60-page summary eventually became the basis of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Though the book made Benedict a household name and a legend in the field of cultural anthropology, it has been widely criticized by Japanese and American scholars of Japan, not least because it relied so much on the perspective of one person. As King puts it a bit gently, "[Benedict's] assessment of Japanese culture could sometimes look like an idealized portrait of the Japanese middle class or of its military elite, precisely the people whom Hashima and other informants knew best."

Of all of Boas's students, the one who provided the most enduring works of cultural anthropology was probably the one whose work departed most from his and his circle's methods: Zora Neale Hurston. While Mead, Benedict, and others sought to identify cultural patterns, Hurston was trying to escape identification altogether. She wrote that she was born to be someone who "questions the gods of the pigeon-holes." Already an active figure in the Harlem Renaissance by the time she was a student at Barnard, she looked for ways to exist within that flourishing movement without being defined by it. "Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem," she observed. "I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject."

Hurston saw in her ethnographic research less an opportunity for codification than for collecting African American folklore without the pressure of having to mold it into a larger narrative of uplift or condemnation. As the scholar Cheryl Wall explained, "The cultural relativity of anthropology freed Hurston from the need to defend her subjects' alleged inferiority." She could simply give them space to voice their views and describe their lives as they experienced them. "My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color," she wrote. "It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes.... Inherent differences, no."

Boas encouraged Hurston to return to her native Florida for her fieldwork, to collect folktales, jokes, and the kind of stories of life back home that she entranced her audiences in Harlem with. In the South she spoke to "more than a hundred different people: phosphate miners, domestics, laborers, boys and girls, Bahamian plantation owners, shopkeepers, ex-slaves, sawmill hands, housewives, railroad workers, restaurant keepers, laundresses, preachers, bootleggers, along with a Tuskegee graduate, a 'barber when free,' and a 'bum and roustabout'" (the last was Hurston's parlance), and instead of a work of anthropology, she turned her fieldwork into the 1935 novel *Mules and Men*, beginning what would become her hallmark of ethnographically informed fiction, or literary anthropology, as it became known.

Hurston's writings showcased a rigor and presence lacking in many other works of cultural anthropology at the time, particularly as Benedict continued to proselytize for anthropology "at a distance." That some of Boas's most committed disciples believed their subjects deserved no better than this kind of detached study showed how much they carried within their work many of the same prejudices they claimed it was dismantling. Indeed, one of the most pernicious threads that emerges in King's study of the Boasians is the way in which "culture," despite being seen as a countertheory to "race," ultimately just made racism more palatable. Cultural inferiority was something liberals could live with and feel less guilty about.

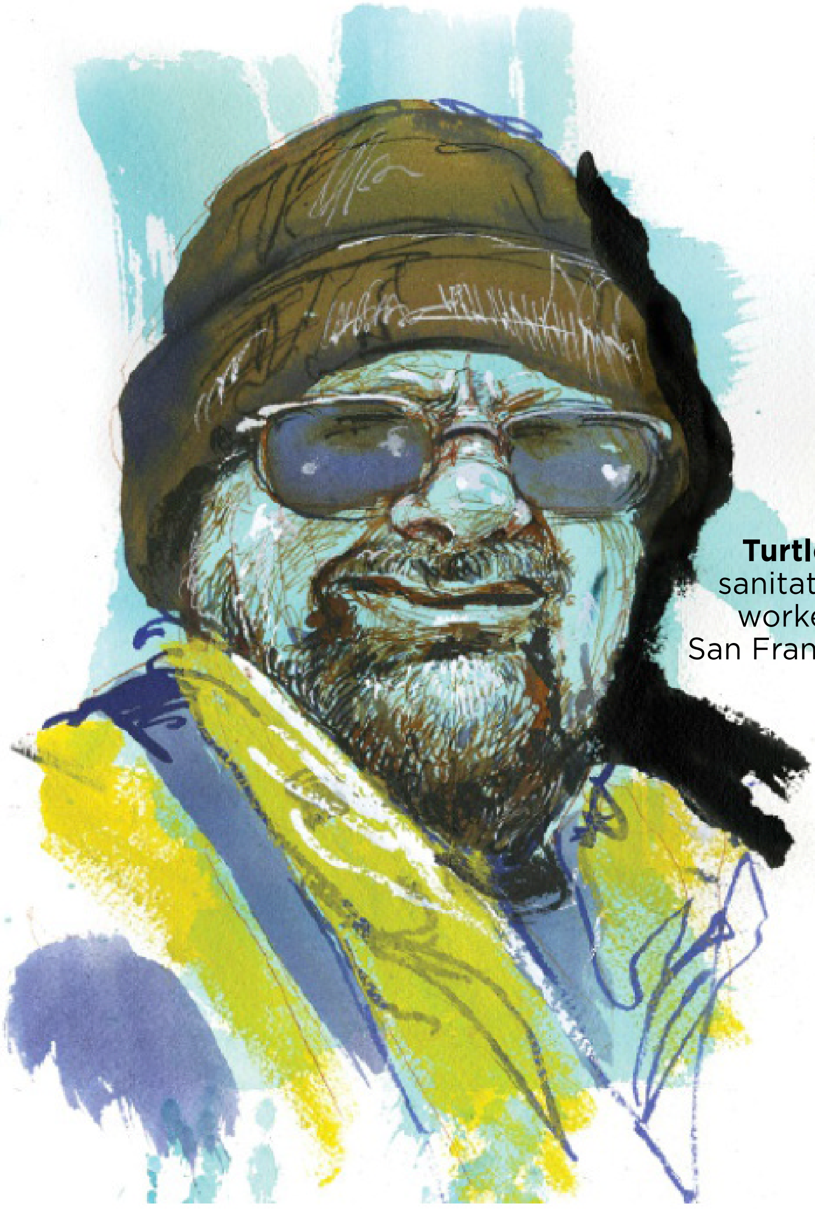
The long shadow cast by cultural anthropology's troubling framework persisted well into the 1960s and '70s. In the '60s, the Harvard sociologist and Democratic politician Daniel Patrick Moynihan, putting together his report "The Negro Family" for Lyndon Johnson, blamed "ghetto culture," not racism and racial inequality, for the poverty and social instability plaguing black families. This language was renewed in the 1990s, when Bill Clinton, in defending his so-called welfare reform bill, said he wanted to "change the culture of dependency" in America. Such language united across party lines the many politicians looking to scapegoat the poor and disenfranchised. In 2014, then-Representative Paul Ryan discussed his plans to take on poverty by telling reporters, "We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working, and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning to value the culture of work, so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with."

That Boas's intervention against racism and racial inequality would ultimately produce a reincarnation of them, albeit cloaked in more respectable language, is less surprising after reading *Gods of the Upper Air*, in which King admits that Boas fell into the habit of letting "cultural inferiority [stand] in for biological inferiority." Boas, Mead, Benedict, and their circle sought to show the fallacy of biological and physical difference, but they also created forms of categorization without questioning the underlying biases that might inform them. To return to Boas in his days as a university student, with his plates at the harbor: Did he really think that all Germans (or all Eskimos, for that matter) agreed on when blue became aquamarine? Certainly not, but a patternless individualism would have been impossible to codify and make into a science; such chaos—or humanity—is more the stuff of great art. Hurston, attuned to both, put it best: "There is no single face in nature, because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle. So every man's spice-box seasons his own food." ■

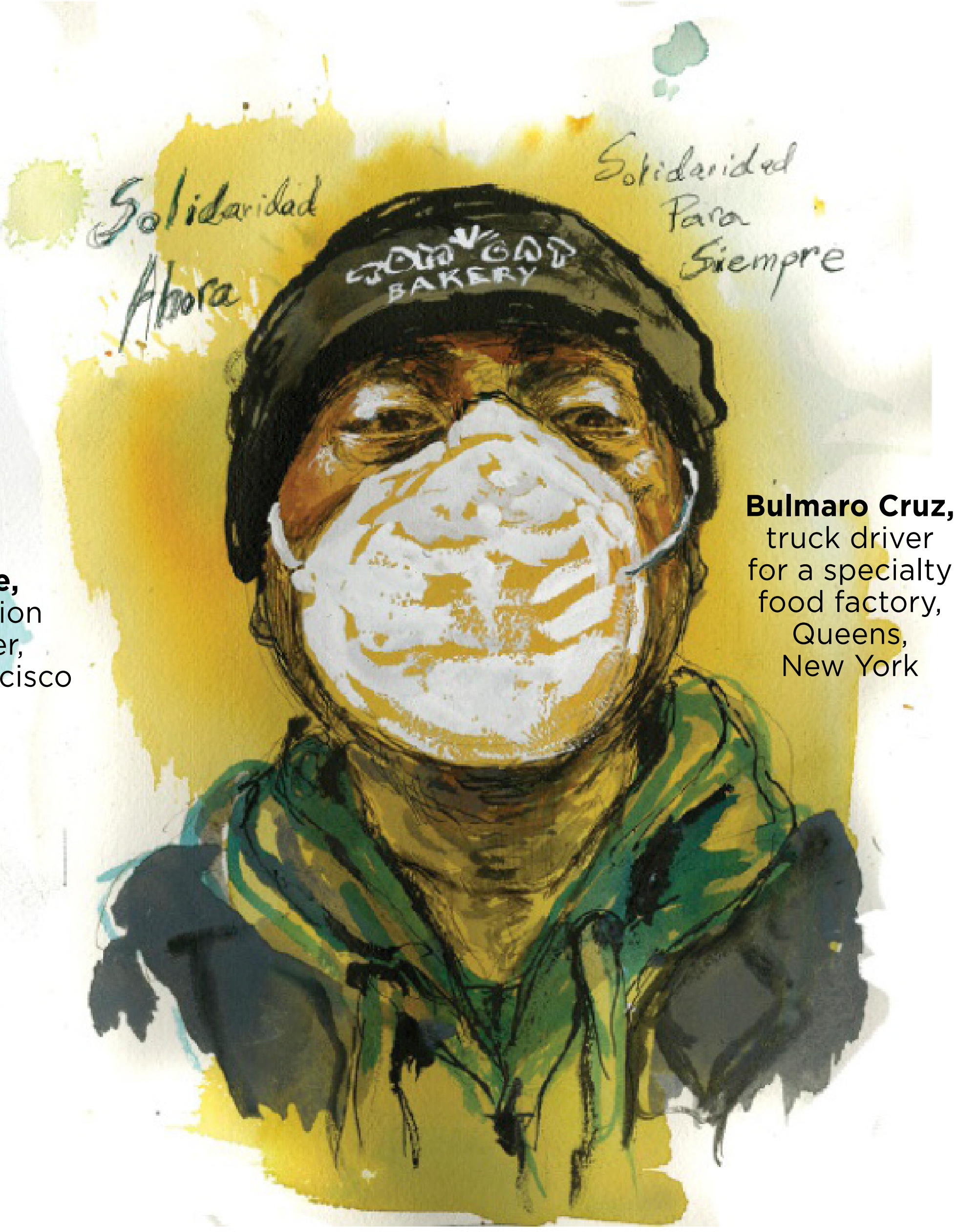
MOLLY CRABAPPLE'S SKETCHBOOK

Faces of the Crisis

There are many lessons to be learned from this horrible disease, but one is that the people who grow the food and lug the boxes and tend the sick have the power to make the world stand still. This crisis also proves that they have the power to demand their due for all that they have created.



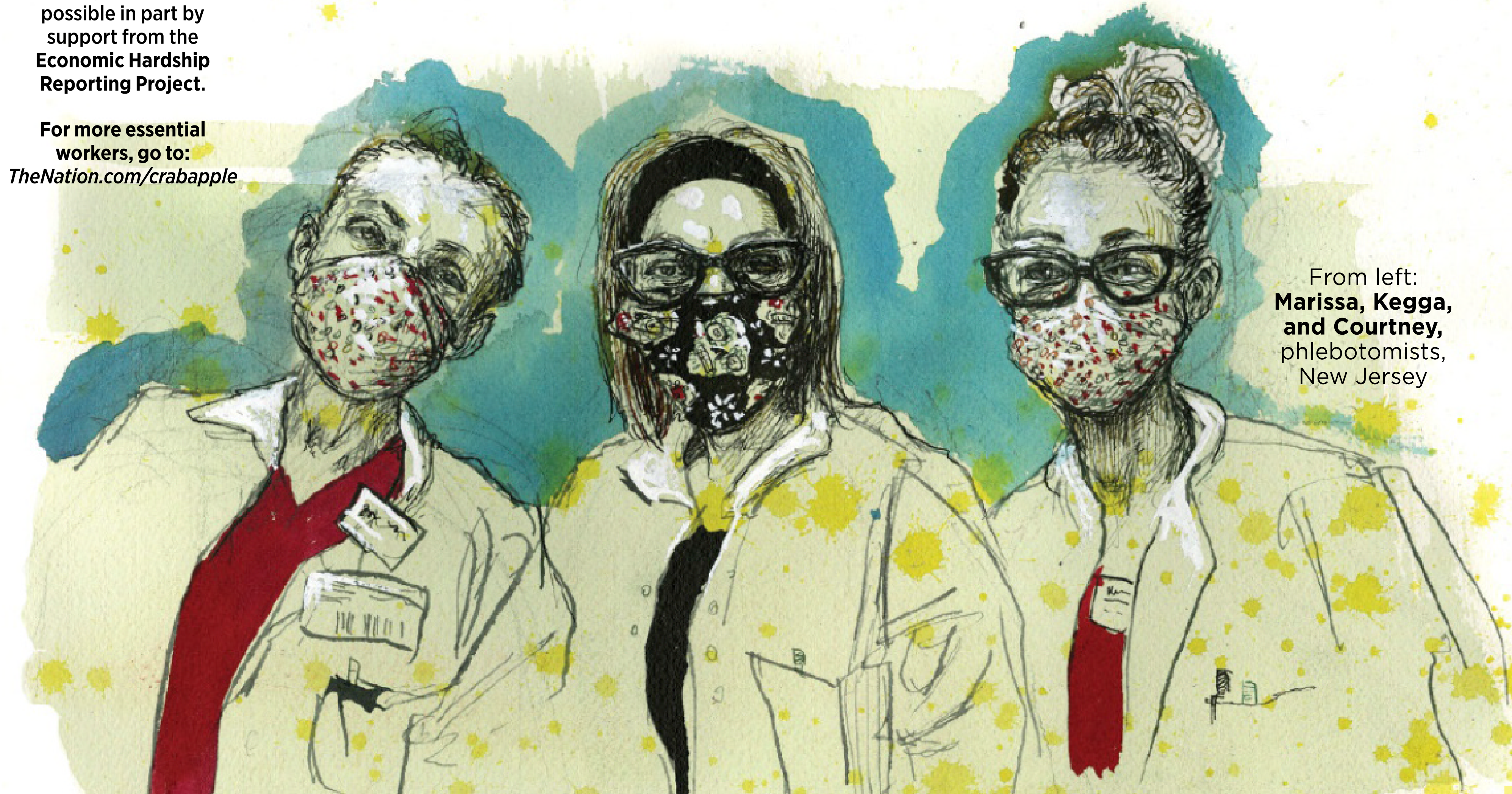
Turtle, sanitation worker, San Francisco



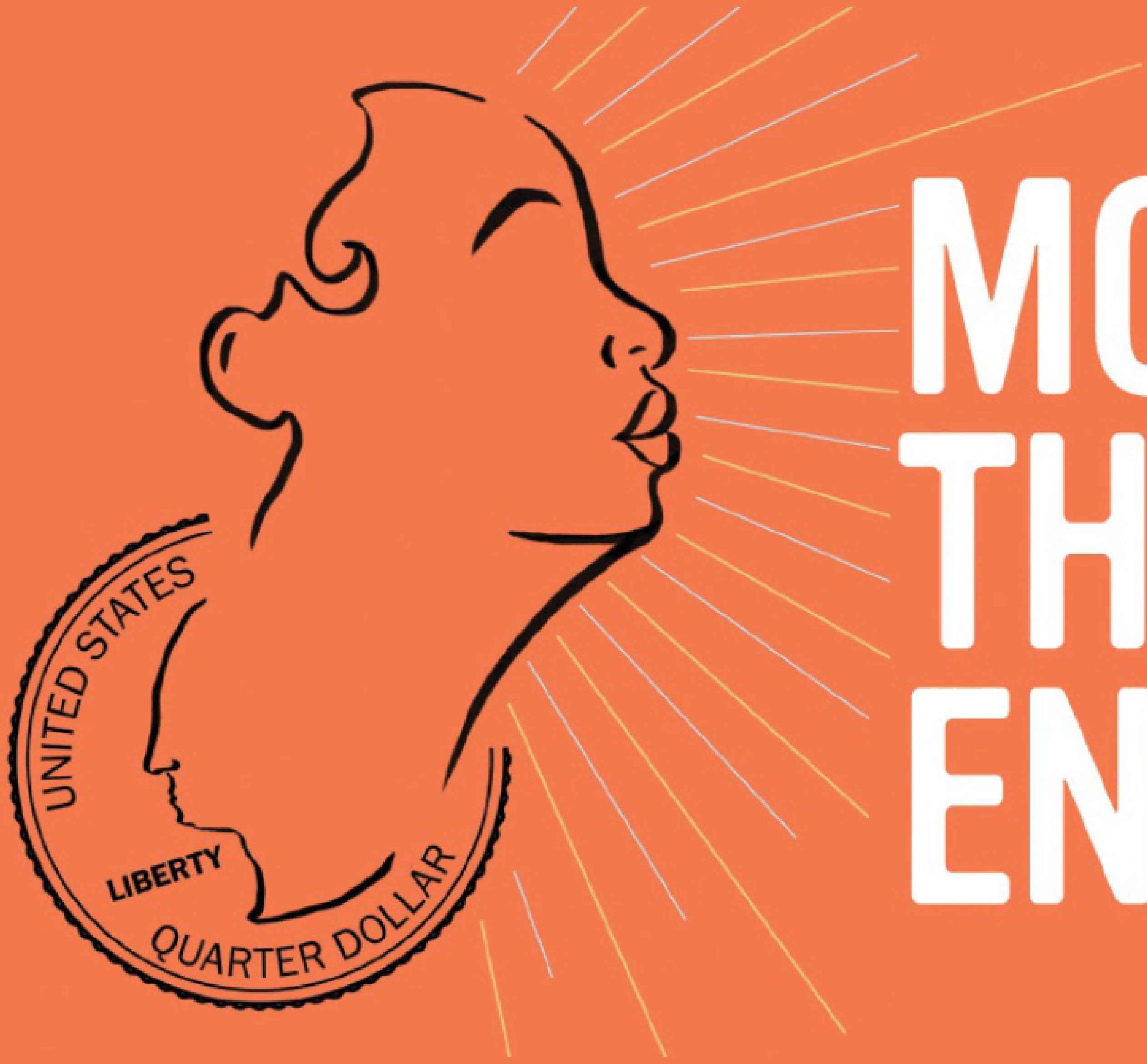
Bulmaro Cruz, truck driver for a specialty food factory, Queens, New York

This project was made possible in part by support from the **Economic Hardship Reporting Project.**

For more essential workers, go to: ***TheNation.com/crabapple***



From left: **Marissa, Kegga, and Courtney,** phlebotomists, New Jersey



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